4-11-2007

The Visual Story of Ruby Red Slippers: Costume Design in Children's Theatre

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The Visual Story of Ruby Red Slippers:

Costume Design in Children's Theatre

A Thesis

Presented to the

Department of Theatre

and the

Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

University of Nebraska

by

Bethany Chloe Elliott Merkling

April 11, 2007

THESIS ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College, University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Theatre Arts University of Nebraska at Omaha.

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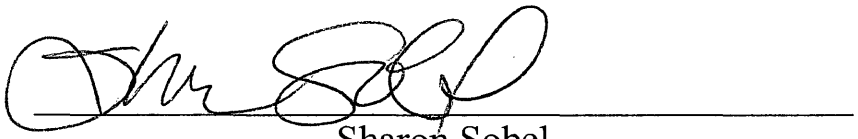

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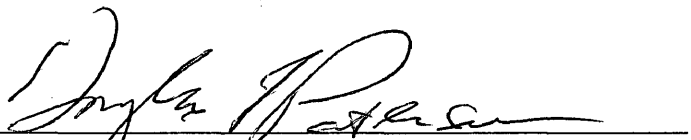

Douglas Paterson: Chairperson

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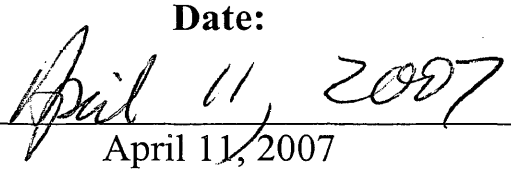

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The Visual Story of Ruby Red Slippers: Costume Design in Children's Theatre

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University of Nebraska, 2007

Advisor: Douglas Paterson

This paper examines children's theatre costume design in order to discuss its role in the overall production and the factors leading to successful audience communication.

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Introduction

Clothing communicates. Even our shoes are continually sending messages. Ruby red slippers conjure visions of an Emerald City, Munchkins, and flying monkeys. Blue suede shoes bring to mind Elvis's rebellious rock and roll, and Cinderella's glass slipper is instantly equated with classic, fairy tale romance. Countless studies demonstrate that our clothing sends messages to those around us. As we look throughout history of the last 2500 years, we find that theatre is invariably used for this same purpose: to communicate with or send a message to an audience. It comes as no surprise that theatre has employed costume as a medium through which to achieve this objective. Costumes have coexisted with theatre from its very beginnings. My interests lay in the costume of children's theatre in the United States and Canada. By examining the role children's theatre has historically fulfilled within the society of the United States and Canada and thus its goals today, as well as the role of experience in perception, and the basic aesthetic elements of design, I hope to establish an overview of costume design considerations in the children's theatre. With the belief that costume is a form of visual communication, this paper's main objective will be a discussion of effective visual communication through costume design for children between the ages of 4 and 11. In order to best create the framework from which to examine this topic, the following introductory overview will discuss the basic role of costume in theatrical production so as to conclude with statements concerning the relevancy of costume in children's theatre.

Let us begin with a brief examination of the necessity and function of costume in production. Here much debate begins. Consider the following: Costume exists and is a factor in every theatrical production. Some theatre scholars may take exception to such a claim. Theorists such as Grotowski believe that theatre is composed solely of the actor-audience relationship. In his book, Towards A Poor Theatre, he states, "By gradually eliminating what proved superfluous, we found that theatre can exist without make-up, without autonomic costume and scenography, without a separate performance area (stage), without lighting and sound effects, etc. It cannot exist without the actor-spectator relationship or perpetual, direct, 'live' communion" (Grotowski 19). However, what Grotowski fails to acknowledge is the difficulty in removing costume from the stage. Unless the audience was to experience a theatre event through only the sense of sound, in the case of a radio play, the audience is still receiving messages through visual clues and sight affecting what is perceived and therefore the actor-spectator communion. For this reason, I maintain that even "lack of a costume" is indeed a costume, an aesthetic element worn on the body sending a visual message to the audience and thus is part of the theatrical experience. Even if an actor were to perform without clothing, the naked body still becomes a sort of costume. The naked actor is very atypical and truly stands out, commenting on the character's lack of conformity, daring, or vulnerability. Notably, Grotowski never did this. His actors always had on a "costume".

Moreover, what the actor is wearing, regardless of whether it is intentionally planned, has an effect on the story. When discussing the role of costume in television

programming, Butler says, "It is a significant part of the program's narrative system" (Butler 104). The same holds true for set and sound. If a play is performed outside, the trees, birds chirping, and grass become part of the set and sound. I argue that even when not intentionally planned for, set, sound, lighting, and costume can not be eliminated; their very essence makes them part of the theatre because they have an effect on the communication between actor and spectator.

Assuming that costume does indeed exist and is a factor in any theatre production, consider then that what we see others wearing is a form of communication. While this may sound obvious, it is worthy of further investigation. Let us consider some examples of clothing as communication in a distinctly political context. Mussolini provides one such example. Through his use of commissioned art work, he managed to promote his idea of the "new organic whole." This made-to-order art combined traditional folk art and classical images. Through this combination Mussolini was able to evoke a sort of universal history. Rubenstein elaborates:

> In that art, men assume the various postures of victory portrayed in ancient Roman times yet they hold familiar farm implements and are thus seen as agricultural victors. Through this appeal to a pride in a shared past, made visible in synthetic images, Mussolini gained support for his political program (Rubenstein 4).

The use of clothing in these images is very important. The silhouette and line of the garments needed to exemplify rather then hide the Roman victory poses. Yet, the

garments could not disassociate the people from the artwork. The dress needed to be reflective of the contemporary style, without being the high fashion of the very wealthy. Rubenstein discusses the use of agricultural tools as sorts of props, but the clothing styles and earth toned colors also reflect an agriculture-based existence. This simple use of clothing effectively communicated a whole social idea.

Yet, another more contemporary example comes from an article examining the effect of clothing on social participation. It documents the effect of clothing choice on the rehabilitation process of persons with disabilities and on their subsequent social participation. When rehabilitation clients in the United States and the United Kingdom were dressed in clothing that was "fashionable" and allowed them to fit in with the group, their level of participation in social activities increased. The results of the study highlight the importance of individual appearance within our society, not only for our perception of others, but also for the individual's feeling of healthy identity. "These findings confirmed the importance of wearing a 'normative clothing style' for individuals with disabilities (Kaiser et al., 1985)[sic] since it facilitated their identification with others and promoted social participation" (Macdonald, Bua-Iam, and Majumder). In other words, clothing that was the same as others in a social group communicated that an individual wanted to participate more actively in an activity. It also likely made the group more accepting of the individual.

Our second topic is the function of costume in production. Although, clearly costumes' work is to communicate, I think even more is more involved. It is commonly accepted that costume in performance is a transmitter of social messages,

identifier of character, informer to the audience, and mode by which a character can be empowered or subjugated. This list is certainly not complete and costume does not necessarily do all these things simultaneously or in every production. Based on the needs of the production, the communicatory role costume fulfills may change. For example, in one production the costumes may identify a character, but another production might call for the costumes to disguise the actors so one actor appears no different from another. What follows is a general discussion of costumes' common functions within a production.

First, costume can be used to send social messages. "Clothing, right from our first direct evidence twenty thousand years ago," notes Elizabeth Wayland Barber, "has been the handiest solution to conveying social messages visually, silently, continuously"(9). Rubenstein elaborates, "Ideas, beliefs, and values--the basic constructs of collective life--are embodied in images" (Rubenstein 4). Kaiser documents the way in which the "old" rich use clothing to distinguish themselves from the new rich:

> "The 'old' rich want to keep themselves distinct from the 'new' rich, so this prompts them to dress in plain, conservative clothes made of high quality, expensive fabrics that display their refined sense of good taste. In an early study by Barber and Lobel (1952), it was found that 'old money' families typically associated with British styles of dress (tweeds and classic woolens) rather than French styles (high fashion).

> The lower-upper class, in contrast, was associated with original French fashions, which reflected wealth" (Kaiser 378).

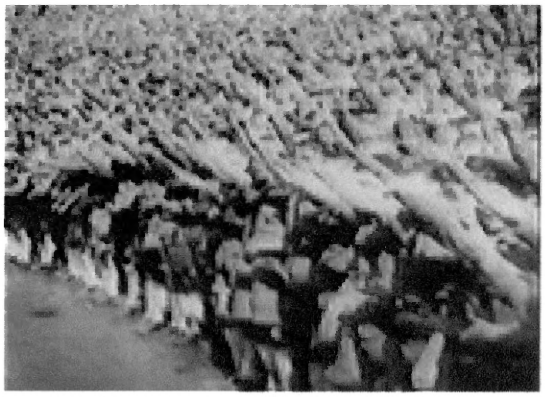
This use of clothing sends a clear social message about new and old money: namely that new money is showy and self absorbed, whereas old money is timeless and cultured.

Hitler's Nazi Cinema understood the need for collective images in order to promote their desired social message. In the book, Entertaining the Third Reich: Illusions of Wholeness in Nazi Cinema, Schulte-Sasse discusses the numerous images of the collective in Nazi drama. People were not portrayed alone, but rather as part of large groups. This was to facilitate the idea of unity, openness between the government and the people, while at the same time conveying the idea that the government was always watching. Hitler himself discusses the importance of the group in his book Mein Kampf:

> The mass meeting is . . . necessary for the reason that in it the individual, who at first, while becoming a supporter of a young movement, feels lonely and easily succumbs to the fear of being alone, for the first time gets the picture of a larger community, which in most people has a strengthening, encouraging effect . . . The community of the great demonstration not only strengthens the individual, it also unites and helps to create an esprit de corps.. . (42).

The question then becomes how this group was achieved. A simple band of people stood side by side do not always appear to be a group. They can just as easily appear

to enemies as they can a unified group. However, let us look at some stills from the Nazi propaganda film Der Ewige Jude translated to English as The Eternal Jew.





The three stills located on page 8 depict groupings of Aryan Germans. The three stills on this page depict groupings of Jews. Clearly the clothing identifies these people as belonging to two different groups. When looking at the top row the clothing is bright, neat, clean, and orderly. There are no head coverings or facial hair. No one is even wearing glasses. The women are all trim and lean, the men slightly portly, but not obese. The second row contrasts remarkably. The men are much thinner. The clothing is dark and disheveled. Many wear head coverings and one man even wears glasses. These demonstrate the use of clothing to make a group, sending the social messages previously discussed. It is also worthy to note the extent to which the clothing of the people in these stills create a social commentary on each

group – one is desirable, the other isn't. Schulte-Sasse states, "The imagination shapes political reality according to the imaginary" (35). Clothing as imagery clearly helps shape our political and social reality.

Second, costume can be used to identify the character. Although not always the case, many productions require the spectator to follow a character throughout the course of the play. Moreover, society has trained us to receive messages and identify people by their clothing. The audience becomes disoriented and even frustrated if they are unable to follow a plot because they are unable to identify characters. Costume can aid in this process. One of the most basic identifications is male and female. In "S/He: Changing Sex and Changing Clothes", Claudine Griggs describes the anger people felt when they were unable to identify her as either male or female:

> If an observer had to interact with me and could not immediately decipher whether I were male or female, that person would often indirectly ask for clarification. An innocuous "Don't I know you from somewhere?" would elicit a response and allow the observer to hear my voice and manner. Then, depending on the evaluation, that person might be irritated because I was a woman who didn't act like a woman, or a man who didn't act like a man (Griggs 3).

People have an understandable desire to identify characters. We feel threatened and become frustrated and detached when we are unable to do this. Imagine a story of Cinderella in which we were unable to distinguish Cinderella from her Evil Step Mother or from the Prince. Moreover, imagine watching a football

game in which the players did not wear any sort of uniform. Most of us would feel confused, maybe even angry, but more importantly, many people would not watch the game. The same holds true for theatre. If audiences cannot distinguish characters, they probably will not watch the play.

Third, costume is often used to inform us about the characters. Simply by looking at what an individual is wearing we can get an idea about who they are as a person and their role in the story.

> Dr. Mark Greene's scrubs and glasses (ER), Columbo's distinctively rumpled trench coat (Peter Falk on Columbo [1971–1977]), B.A.'s copious jewellery (Mr. T on The A-Team [1983–87]), and even Kenny's cartoon snow parka (South Park [1997–]) help construct the characters who wear them. Costume is one of the first aspects of a character that we notice and on which we build expectations (Butler 104).

Butler further elaborates, making clear just how much costume can tell us about a character.

> Columbo's rumpled overcoat expresses the sort of detective he is—suggesting that he doesn't care about superficial things like appearance and also misleading murder suspects into thinking he doesn't notice details. He was so clearly identified by his iconography that ads [...] needed only ask rhetorically: "How many detectives can catch a killer with nothing but a trench coat and a cigar? Only one. Peter Falk in

> the role he made famous … Columbo: Ashes to Ashes [2000] on ABC"
>
> 
>
> (http://www.tv.com/columbo/show/1011/summary.html).

This is much the same as Superman's red and blue spandex suit, which emphasizes not only his muscular physique, but also encourages associations with American Nationalism. A logical association since he is designed to defend "truth, justice, and the American way."

Costume can say a great deal about characters in a production by identifying them as good or evil, organized or disorganized, rebellious or conservative, even distinguishing places in a social hierarchy, or internal emotions. How much of a coincidence is it that in Disney's Winnie The Pooh's Eeyore, the down trodden donkey, is a dismal grey? Rubenstein discusses clothing as a means to indeed reveal truths about a character:

> Nineteenth-century novelists, such as Balzac, Flaubert, Proust, Dickens, and Trollope, wrote detailed descriptions of what their characters wore. For example, when Flaubert described Madame Bovary's initial appearance in the kitchen of her father's small farm, he wrote that she was wearing a blue merino wool dress with three

> flounces. The clothing carried the message that she was fun-loving, frivolous, fashion-conscious, and out of place. Playwrights also describe garments as a means of delineating a character. Today, no newspaper reporter would write a profile of someone without describing the person's style of dress. The implication is that a person's clothing somehow reflects his or her character (Rubenstein 4).

From Rubenstein's comments, we glean that people not only gather information from, but actually look to costume as a source of insight into a character.

To quickly summarize, costume is a part of theatrical production, eliminated only by the elimination of the spectator's sense of sight. Moreover, costume constantly sends messages to the audience, although the specific communicatory role of costume, as character identifier, social message transmitter, and so on, depends on the production team and vision.

We are ready now to introduce more directly the topic of this paper: Costume in Children's Theatre. The previous discussion addressed costume in theatre as a whole; however, children's theatre is somewhat distinct from theatre targeting more adult audiences. One of the key differences is the increased importance of costume in children's theatre. For the purposes of this paper, the term children's theatre will be used to refer to theatre targeting audiences between the ages of four and eleven. Children between these ages have a distinct developmental feature which emphasizes the visual. "Young children rely predominantly on imagery for representing information in memory, whereas older children and adults tend to use more abstract

linguistic representations" (Cohn 15). Due to the fact that children represent information in imagery rather than in word, children will remember the costume better then the dialogue. Hence, costume being a visual aspect of the performance will have a substantial effect on audiences of children. Knowing this developmental truth, I would suggest that in order to cater to a child audience, the acting for children's theatre should be especially physical with a foundation in imagery to tell the story. In other words, successful children's theatre requires productions that have a strong visual element, in addition to the text. Costumes can enhance this visual imagery. Moreover, the storyline and message are generally rooted with the characters and their actions. As compared to other visual elements of the production such as the set or lighting, the costume differs in that it is personal to each character. "Clothing, more than any other object or possession, is closely identified with the body" (Felshin 3). As the production's message and story is typically grounded in the characters and with an audience of children, who represent information visually, costume, one of the most visual elements unique to the character, increases in importance. Costume visually enhances and by nature communicates, and it is these visual images that are crucial to the storytelling in children's theatre. Jane Doonan in her discussion of picture books and the importance of visual imagery to children elaborates further:

> "Pictures, through their expressive powers, enable the book to function as an art object: something which gives form to ideas and to which we can attach our ideas. The value in this case lies in the aesthetic

> experience and the contribution the picture book can make to our aesthetic development. In this aesthetic experience we are engaged in play of the most enjoyable and demanding kind. By playing with ideas provoked by works of art, we create something of our own from it. And in that play we have to deal with abstract concepts logically, intuitively and imaginatively" (Doonan 7).

Designers are the ones creating the images and communicate in the most effective way in which children learn. This leaves the designer with both a great challenge and important responsibility.

Although the importance of visual imagery to children and the concept of visual literacy are becoming accepted in education, they have long existed in the world of children's theatre. Therefore, it is logical for the children's theatre costume designer to examine the history of costume in children's theatre before deciding to reinvent the wheel. What follows in Chapter One is a brief survey of the history of children's theatre in the United States and Canada.

Chapter One

History of Children's Theatre

Costume in children's theatre has not been a topic of extensive academic study. This leaves the scholar interested in children's theatre costuming forced to pursue other avenues and related subject matter in order to further understand the subject. One of the most effective paths of research involves an examination of children's theatre as a whole and then more specifically the actual costume designs themselves. By looking at the history of children's theatre, we gain insight into its role and purpose within society. Moreover, by understanding societies' employment of children's theatre, we can begin to understand the position that costume plays in fulfilling that role. This also allows the designer to have an established goal toward which to work. For these reasons, this chapter will focus on the history of children's theatre.

Theatre has come to encompass many different forms of stage play within the United States and Canada. We see everything from the mainstream of New York's Broadway to groups like Halifax's Zuppa Circus and Omaha's Blue Barn, which seek to challenge and educate as much as to entertain. We see the more traditional productions of Stratford and Shaw Festivals, SoulPepper and many repertory theatres, as well as regionally focused productions such as those done by the Charlottetown Festival, Mulgrave's Mulgrave Road Theatre Company, or Omaha's The Witching Hour. Theatre artists are taking their craft and fitting it into niches well beyond the

entertainment industry. For example, Omaha's R.E.S.P.E.C.T. addresses date rape and bullying in their plays aimed at high school students. When we look to children's theatre we find it is as varied as its adult counterpart. "The world of theatre for children and youth is far flung and rich in its diversity" (Davis and Evans 3). Still, many theatre artists seem to overlook children's theatre. Davis and Evans directly address this issue in their book Theatre, Children, and Youth:

> If you bring with you the impression that here is a pretty stodgy art form, steeped in tradition and virtually without prestige in the great theatre world, perhaps a place where actors work when they can't find real work, or where amateurs play at making theatre for kiddies who won't know the difference, then we hope you will pay close attention along the way and will ultimately arrive at your destination with some new attitudes and perhaps a commitment to become part of the new image (Davis and Evans 3).

For many, wearing ears and a tail is used as a career starter and lasts only as long as it takes to find work in "real theatre". For this reason, the historic base of children's theatre lies with educators and social workers as opposed to theatre artists. Yet, children's theatre serves an important role within the North American society. Through an examination of the history of children's theatre within the United States, the important role of children's theatre in the American community will become evident.

Children's Theatre 1700-1900

Children's theatre began as a product of the United States educational setting in the eighteenth century. Jonathan Levy notes in Spotlight On The Child: Studies in the History of American Children's Theatre, "performances and recitations of one kind or another were simply too common to be taken special note of" (5). During this time, it was uncommon to have a professional playwright or author write theatrical work targeted towards children. Moreover, the professional playwright did not emerge in the U.S. until the mid-eighteenth century. Therefore, the performance materials for these very early children's theatre productions were often adaptations of plays originally designed for adult audiences, or plays written by school masters and school mistresses specifically designed for their pupils. The most famous of these school master playwrights is Charles Stern of Massachusetts. During his lifetime, 1753-1826, he wrote thirty dramatic dialogues for his pupils. However, as the new world began to transition from pioneers to citizens and the concerns shifted away from basic survival, and the industrial revolution created a solid middle class allowing the general populace a small discretionary income, people began to seek more elaborate forms of entertainment. This set into motion the substantial growth of children's theatre in the latter part of the 1800's.

Children's Theatre 1900-1910

By 1900, children's theatre had become a booming business.

> During Easter week in 1900, an adult in New York had the choice of amusing a child at seven different shows recommended by the *New York Times: Jack and the Giant; Kindergarten; Rip Van Winkle;* Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show; Forepaugh and Sells Brothers Circus; some "Clever artists" at Keith's; or Linus II, the equine wonder, at the Huber's Museum (Salazar 25).

Even Broadway was targeting younger audiences. The Wizard of Oz opening June 6, 1902, Babes In Toyland opening in 1906, and The Pied Piper opening December 3, 1908 were some of the most popular Broadway musicals and were aimed at youth as well as adults. These and other productions demonstrate that the children's theatre of this period was heavily based on spectacle. The circus, vaudeville shows, musicals, and pantomime were very common and quite popular. This focus on elaborate costumes and set caused one critic to comment, concerning the oft staged Cinderella, that "even rats and mice have become as scarce as pumpkins in the increased demand for the materials whereof fairy coaches and their establishments are made" (Salazar 26). In his book The Story of Pantomime, A.E. Wilson describes the pantomime for children in the early twentieth century United States and its focus on spectacle:

> There must be songs, there must be a ballet; there should be some sufficient reproduction of a fairy tale to be recognizable to children, there should be scope for the impossible, the absurd, the grotesque and there should be a full stage and plenty of spectacle. The songs should

> be tuneful, the dances should be exhibitions of grace and skill, the ballet should be a harmony of movement. The transformation scene should be as beautiful as it can be made. Above all, the drollery should be droll and the fun should be funny (Levy 26).

The aesthetic was important, and entertainment was the priority goal.

This is not to say that the didactic was absent in the children's theatre of the early twentieth century. Some playwrights did intentionally try to write plays with a moral. The Pied Piper is a prime example. In this musical, Father Time grants eternal life to a town on the condition that the town's people live "morally".

It is also important to note that education and entertainment are not necessarily separate entities. Brecht advocates that both be present in the theatre. Costumes, although often disregarded as mere spectacle and entertainment, can communicate. Whole stories are told in picture books. Why should we think set, lights, and costumes have any less potential? Let us be clear, the visual, even the elaborate visual can communicate. A play can be both entertaining and educational. This said, the spectacle focus of the early twentieth century was on entertainment rather than on education.

One unique aspect of the children's theatre during this time was the way in which it catered both to the rich and the poor. Children's theatre was quite fashionable and it was not uncommon for wealthy children to celebrate birthdays at the theatre or to even have a performance brought right to their home. On March 20, 1908, Miss

Ava Astor and sixty of her closest friends saw Cinderella up to Date, performed complete with scenery and costumes, at the Astor Mansion.

However, poor children were not excluded from this pageantry. "Theatre mangers, actors and civic leaders cited the beauty, laughter, and excitement of theatre as a balm for the pains of the world. Thus, wherever sick, sad or poor children gathered, actors appeared to cheer them up. In 1900 alone, the Buffalo Bill Wild West Show played to 4,000 New York orphans" (Salazar 31). Moreover, children's theatre was used as a tool by social workers to aid the immigrants and the poor. In his book International Guide To Children's Theatre and Educational Theatre, Lowell Swortzell states, "Children's theatre in America was born in the ghetto as a social and educational force to help the children of immigrants learn the language of their adopted country, to provide a meeting place for children and their families, and to offer wholesome entertainment to children of the poor" (Swortzell 333). Thus, we find the theatre targeted at poor children had more of an educational focus than the theatre targeted toward the rich. However, even this more educationally based theatre for the poor still focused on entertainment, especially to help these children momentarily to leave behind the difficulties of their lives.

The first documentation of a permanent children's theatre was the Children's Educational Theatre, established by social worker Alice Minnie Hart at the Educational Alliance in New York City in 1903. Ms. Hart was interested in both the performing arts and in helping the children of poverty. She observed the appeal theatre had for adults at the settlement house and began theatrical productions, story

telling, story acting, and classes in puppetry aimed at children. These activities drew in scores of urban poor youth to the center. Unfortunately, The Children's Educational Theatre closed in 1910 due to a lack of funds. However, Alice Hart was not the only social worker to use the theatre; numerous groups were formed in poor neighborhoods in Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, and Detroit, to name a few. Even the famous Jane Addams, director of the Chicago Settlement House, is noted for her work as a children's theatre playwright. Although most of this educational and outreach theatre took place after 1910 and will be elaborated on later in this paper, the vast majority of children's theatre productions in this period are entertainment extravaganzas. Throughout this decade it can be said that "the entertainments devised for young people in New York City were fashioned to enliven and delight, whether spectacle, musical, vaudeville, pageant, or show. Whether for the rich or the needy, the theatre provided charming escapism" (Salazar 32).

Children's Theatre 1910- 1920

Theatre thrived in the settlement house settings. "During these first twenty years of the century, Hull House in Chicago, Peabody House in Boston, Henry Street Settlement in New York, Karamu House in Cleveland, and other community welfare centers followed Miss Hart's experiments with their own" (Goldberg 27). This settlement house theatre began to dominate children's theatre in the United States and in turn theatre began to shift from its entertainment focus to education. "Their

purpose was social welfare, and theatre was merely a handy group activity with cultural overtones" (Goldberg 27).

One of the most influential groups to affect children's theatre was the Junior League. Founded in 1901 by Mary Harriman, an eighteen year old New York college student, the league was originally composed of eighty debutants wanting to perform volunteer social work activities. "This was an organization designed to provide meaningful activities for wealthy young women" (Bedard 36). Today, the league has grown substantially and now, as of 2006, is composed of 193,000 members in 296 leagues located in The United States, Canada, Great Britain, and Mexico (http://home.earthlink.net/~juniorleaguesb/ajli.html). Although the focus of the league is social work as opposed to theatre, the league has often employed children's theatre in their community service.

> When thrust into the settlement house world, these young women quickly learned that they had few social work skills, so they capitalized on what they believed they could do well. They used their social connections to raise money through the performance of an entertainment, and they relied upon their artistic training--required of all well-bred young women of the time-- to conduct music and art classes and to provide entertainment for the kindergarten" (Bedard 36).

Their training often led the young women to use children's theatre as an outreach tool. They wrote children's plays, occasionally brought in professional performers, and even donned costume and make-up and performed in schools. While this organization

was relatively small, the impact on children's theatre in the United States was substantial.

> Although much of the theatre presented by the [Association of Junior Leagues of America] AJLA has been unskilled, it cannot be denied that the energy, commitment, and financial assistance of this group was highly significant, and was, perhaps, the most important single factor in the spreading of children's theatre across the nation" (Goldberg 28).

Yet another contribution to children's theatre between 1910 and 1920 was made by the Portmanteau Theatre and Stuart Walker. Walker worked at Christadora House, a settlement house in New York City, where he wrote plays for young members. However, he also worked as a theatre designer, conceiving and building a portable theatre that could be moved to different venues. "The structure with its modest size and three playing levels is one of the first theatres for children to implement a director's desire for close physical ties between actors and spectators" (Davis and Evans 4). Today, audience interaction in children's theatre is quite common, but in 1915 audience interaction was new and innovative.

Children's Theatre 1920-1930

In 1921, Clare Tree Major, an English immigrant actress, started a theatre company known as the Threshold Players. At the Heckscher Foundation Building in New York City, her troupe performed Treasure Island, Hansel and Gretel, and

Pinocchio, before moving to the Princess Theatre where they produced plays targeted specifically towards High School Students. However, Majors most well-known accomplishment came in 1928 when she began the nation's first Children's Theatre Touring Program. The form also began to spread to the universities. The mid-twenties saw the establishment of the Children's Theatre of Evanston, Illinois, a joint venture between the Northwestern University School of Speech and the Evanston School system and headed by Winifred Ward.

The Junior League continued their involvement in children's theatre. "Children's Theatre was, in one form or another, the pet project of nearly every 1920's Junior League" (Bedard 37). One League that is especially noteworthy is the Chicago League. In 1924 Chicago League member voted to make theatre their "main work" (Bedard 37). After this vote, the Chicago League began producing a full season of plays for young audiences and devoting the majority of their budget and time to "elaborate scenery, costumes, props, salaries for professional directors, negotiations with union stage-hands, theatre rental, ticket sales and the sales of advertisements in souvenir programs" (Bedard 37). In December of 1926, the Chicago League hosted a meeting for all Leagues with who sponsored a children's theatre. The meeting drew in representatives from all over the United States and is credited with forming a national organization called The Play Bureau. By 1929, the Play Bureau was hosting the National Children's Theatre Conference. The conference had 150 delegates in attendance, who saw a children's theatre production by the Chicago League,

participated in discussion groups, and attended lectures by scenic designer Robert Edmund Jones and drama Critic Barrett Clark.

Children's Theatre 1930-1940

Children's theatre located in the community grew substantially during the 1930's. One such example is the Junior Programs, Inc. Junior Programs, Inc began in 1936 under the leadership of Dorothy McFadden, a mother dissatisfied with the quality of theatrical productions available to her children. McFadden's program, based in Maplewood, New Jersey, was designed "to sponsor children's entertainment in [...the...] community" (Davis and Evans 5). However, this idea took root and other such community theatres for children began to appear throughout the United States.

During this time, universities also began to take an active role in the production of children's theatre. "The real growth in educationally-sponsored children's theatre began in the late 1930's and continued vigorously for over twenty years, spearheading the American children's theatre movement"(Goldberg 29). Interest was stimulated from coast to coast. Universities such as the University of California and the University of Delaware began children's theatre programs.

The Federal Theatre Project was established in April of 1935. Although the Federal Theatre Project did not specifically target children, it sponsored a number of children's productions during its three year existence. The Federal Theatre Project explored new scripts, investigated child involvement in the play-making process, and conducted research on "child audiences, their reactions to plays, and age-level programming" (Swortzell 337). The project is also credited with the expansion of

professional children's theatre. "Heretofore, with some exceptions, children's theatre had been in the hands of amateurs and educators; the Federal Theatre brought professionals into an ongoing program for child audiences" (Heard 114). The Federal Theatre Project ended in 1939 when congress dissolved the effort due to financial shortage and suspicion of communist influence in the project.

Children's Theatre 1940-1950

The production of theatre during wartime was at best difficult. The war pulled men away from home and women were left to keep the country running.

> "The war situation had reached a point where the problems confronted by the children's theatres were more obvious. [...] These [problems] included a loss of volunteers -- due to members moving from the city, losing domestic help or becoming involved with war work-and the technical problems caused by the rationing of gas and tires and the shortage of other materials. (Bedard 43)

Even the ever-ambitious Junior League was forced to modify operations. In 1943 the Chicago League found themselves without actresses and was forced to "hire a professional company to tour the schools [under the]auspices of the Junior League" (Bedard 44).

Yet, this period was not without theatrical advances. The 1940's saw Winifred Ward still hard at work in Illinois. In 1944, she invited a group of children's theatre leaders to the campus of Northwestern University for the purpose of forming a

professional organization. The meeting was successful and the organization became known as the Children's Theatre Association of America.

Children's Theatre 1950 – 2000

Children's theatre remained mainstream and non controversial during most of the 1950's. Many of the children's theatre companies today were born during this decade. The 1970's gave rise to today's largest children's theatre company: The Minneapolis Children's Theatre. The company originally known as The Moppet Players was founded in 1961 by Beth Linnerson and Martha Pierce. At its founding, "The Moppet Players was a social [...] institution, concerned more with the recreational and cultural needs of the neighborhood" (Durham181). In 1963, Martha Pierce even offered after school classes in art, creative drama, and dance. However, when John Clark Donahue joined the theatre in 1962 the focus of the group slowly began to shift. By the 1964-1965 season, Donahue became artistic director and conflict as to the direction of the theatre was at an all time high.

> By 1964 major conflicts had developed between Linnerson, who still saw the primary focus of the company as the socialization of children, and Donahue, who sought artistic excellence. But Linnerson was no longer a dominant figure in the company. The theatre's patron, the Pillsbury-Waite Settlement House and the Pillsbury Citizens' Service, had set up a board of directors to guide the theatre. Because of the company's rapid growth the board appointed John Davidson as

> administrator of The Moppet Players in August of 1963. In the fall of 1964 the board of directors dismissed Linnerson as a staff member of the company and offered her a seat on the board. Linnerson refused the seat and at the end of the 1964-65 season left the company, taking with her the name "The Moppet Players," which she had formally registered under her own name (Durham 182).

The budget of the theatre continued to escalate and the productions became more involved in creating an experience rather then delivering a message.

> Under Donahue's direction the company developed a unique focus and style. From the beginning Donahue thought theatre for children should play to children's sense of wonder, mystery, and amazement. To that end he frequently used flashbacks, montages, slow motion, and cross fades. He also made extensive use of mime, dance, and music, integrating the various arts to create strong sensual images. He proposed to create mystery rather than meaning and to help his audience learn "through sensory means and through participating in the mysterious 'child-poet' vision." With Donahue's approach and direction the Children's Theatre Company won the 1973 American Theatre Association's Jennie Heiden Award for excellence in children's theatre (Durham 183).

Although Donahue was later convicted for the molestation of numerous children while working at the theatre. Still, with the support of the board of directors, he charted the theatre's course for twenty years.

Two legislative advances of note also took place in this period. The National Foundation for the Arts and Humanities Act and the Elementary School Education Act were both passed in 1965. The first "created Endowments for Arts and Humanities- funds to encourage theatre activities, including those for children" (Goldberg 31). Title I and Title III of the latter authorized "expenditure of government funds for children's theatre" (Goldberg 31).

Children's Theatre at Present:

Children's theatre in the United States has come a long way from its classroom roots and is slowly growing more professional. As Smith observes,

> Back then [1900-1980], theatre for young audiences was regarded as the poor stepchild of the theatre world. It was generally seen as the province of amateurs: of schoolmarm playwrights, Junior League directors and actors who couldn't get work on "real" stages. What's worse, many of these stereotypes were true. 'Before the 1980s, theatre for young audiences in the United States wasn't very good,' admits Linda Hartzell, who became the artistic director of the Seattle Children's Theatre in 1985. "Back then, it was starter theatre for

> people who were only doing it until they stepped up to what they thought was legitimate" (Smith 16).

Although Smith iterates many of the attitudes towards children's theatres, it is perhaps an overly harsh account. It is important to remember that early children's theatre groups, such as the Junior League, were instrumental in the creation of contemporary children's theatre. "Many of the prominent professional children's theatre organizations in operation today grew from Junior League operations. Notable among these theatres are Stage One: The Louisville Children's Theatre, Omaha's Emmy Gifford Children's Theatre [The Rose], the Birmingham Children's Theatre and the Nashville Academy Theatre" (Bedard 47). Also of note are accounts of early twentieth century professional children's theatres depicting elaborate professional plays for children including a large number of Broadway runs for children's theatre productions. By contrast, today there are few if any specifically children's theatre plays presented on Broadway, Off Broadway, or Off Off Broadway. Nevertheless, children's theatre is becoming more professional in the United States and the 1965 opening of the Minneapolis Children's theatre has spurred the development of professional children's theatre throughout the country. Linda Hartzell of Seattle's Children's Theatre goes as far as to call children's theatre "the last frontier in American Theatre" (Smith 16). Key in this development towards professional and credible children's theatre has been the beginning of a shift in attitude among the theatre community in regards to children's theatre.

> When the founder of Tempe, Ariz.'s Childsplay, Inc. attended his first Theatre Communications Group meetings 20 years ago, for example, he felt as popular as Quasimodo. "People would come up to me, and they'd do that 'chest check' thing," Saar recalls, pointing at an imaginary nametag. "When they saw I was from a children's theatre, they'd always remember some other place they had to be" (Smith 16).

Thus, we find that although Children's Theatre has long been accepted by society at large, the theatre community has been less accepting and more concerned with children's theatre somehow tainting the craft. It is only recently that the larger theatre community has accepted its step child.

However, it is important not to characterize the theatre community as the evil stepmother. Those critical of children's theatre are not anti-children's theatre, but rather are concerned about the effect of fluffy entertainment on young minds. There are two major criticisms of children's theatre that are especially worthy of note and were largely responsible for the division between children's theatre and the rest of the theatre community. Children's theatre is criticized for being fluff and fantasy and for being used as a tool of social assimilation. For example, the Junior League can be viewed simply as a photo opportunity for the rich and some even view the league's work in children's theatre as more detrimental then helpful. "I think a case could be made that it was groups like the Junior League that dismantled the social connectedness of children's theatre and turned it into pabulum with sparkles" (Paterson). Given that many of the children's theatre productions of the first half of

the twentieth century, such as Cinderella, had a large spectacle focus solely on entertainment, the plays can easily be disregarded as fantastical distraction. Many ask, why respect something with no substance? "I remember running into people in children's theatre in the 70's and wondering how could they do that to children?" (Paterson) Also of note, the educational children's theatre in existence targeted the lower echelons of society: immigrants, orphans, and the poor- not the children of the middle and upper classes. Thus, an argument can be made that this theatre was used to assimilate these groups into "American" culture, or at least the American culture of those rich enough to finance theatre. It is for these reasons that many in the theatre community were and to some degree still are skeptical of children's theatre.

This shift in the role of children's theatre and its place both in the theatre community and the American society remains a topic of much debate. My research has led me to the following conclusion. Theatrical productions created by groups like the Junior League promoted the agenda and cultural values of a small, albeit powerful, sect of American society. Although some argue their productions were not socially connected, this is a false assumption. The plays were indeed socially connected. They promoted the ideas and beliefs of their creators. Even educational work produced during this time was used for the purpose of teaching "the American way." Such cultural assimilation is often characterized as ethnocentric. However, were it not for this early American Children's theatre, it is unlikely children's theatre would have existed in the Americas until the latter part of the twentieth century. Funding by groups like the Junior League, regardless of the motivations of the group

itself, made possible the very existence of children's theatre. In addition, the faults in early children's theatre are also reflected in other aspects of society. One prime example is the educational system, which used school as a guise to assimilate millions of immigrants and Native Americans, teaching only what was deemed necessary by those rich enough to be elected to public office. One example of this use of educational assimilation can be seen in following account of a speech given to students and trustees at a Choctaw school in 1846:

> I showed them [on a map] that the people who speak the English language, and who occupied so small a part of the world, and possessed the greatest part of its wisdom and knowledge; that knowledge they could thus see for themselves was power; and that power was obtained by Christianity alone (Mckenney 19).

This example demonstrates that although early children's theatre had its fault; so, did many other institutions which were also dualistic: both benefiting and hurting society.

Although many defend the theatre community's rejection of children's theatre on the grounds that they were and are unhappy with lack of substance in children's theatre, until recently the theatre community has taken no ownership of or corrective action with respect to children's theatre. This lack of ownership on behalf of the theatre community as a whole leaves the community as guilty for the detrimental aspects or unutilized potential of children's theatre as the very groups which it faults.

This newfound acceptance and ownership of contemporary children's theatre has caused those in the field to divide into two camps. There are those who want to deal with tough challenging issues and those who want to preserve childhood purity and just entertain. For example, the mission statement at the Omaha Rose Children's Theatre never uses the term challenge, because most recently that has not been their objective. They clearly state that they want to enrich lives through theatre and since the turn of the century that has not included presenting challenging productions. Although the 1980's and 1990's this company took a more socially active approach, their productions in the last three years have been closer to the work done in the early twentieth century. They want us to attend the production, have a wonderful time, and be exposed to the arts. In the winter of 2006, I spent an enjoyable afternoon at the Rose Theatre's production of Stewart Little. With its sock hop music, lime green poodle, dancing, hilarious cat, giant mouse which ran through the audience and colored lights, set to light up various parts of the theatre in time to the music, I sat mesmerized through the performance. It was not until it abruptly ended that I realized I had been waiting the whole time for a message I never received. In the end, it was an enjoyable afternoon, but not much else. Certainly, I was entertained, but the production itself lacked substance. In their defense, companies, like the Rose, extol the virtues of the classics.

> Behind the scenes, children's theatre artists sometimes grouse about the old warhorses. "We tend to apologize for that sort of thing," says Saar. "We do The Velveteen Rabbit every year, and backstage we call

> it Velveeta Bunny." But when pressed, they all admit to a fondness for the classics. "I'm sorry, but I want my kids to see Jack and the Beanstalk," says Daugherty. "Those fairy stories are around for a reason, and I want my kids to know real children's literature" (Smith 16).

This is not to say that the classics are not challenging and that fairy tales are without educational method. Although text is important, often times it is the production rather then the text which allows a play to become socially relevant. For example, Jack and The Beanstalk can be portrayed through shallow representation, or one can choose to bring out its many signs and symbols. Does this play not teach that the little guy can win? This play could be talking about kids and adults, the poor and the rich, the individual and adversity, even a kid and their worst school subject. Yet, often times fairy tale productions in children's theatre are simply a surface and entertaining retelling of a classic tale.

While in the past few years, the Rose has drifted away from social relevancy, the Minneapolis Children's Theatre has begun to abandon the entertainment extravaganzas that characterized Donahue's rein and are once again, under the leadership of Peter Brosius, returning to the social relevancy focus of Piece and Linnerson. Although by looking at their season line-up they seem to produce a slightly higher number of "entertainment for entertainment sake" spectacles when compared to a company like the Seattle Children's Theatre, The Minneapolis Children's theatre still hails several educational and challenging productions. A

wonderful example from the 2005 season is Esperanza Rising, a play which tells the story of a rich girl living in Mexico in the 1930's, who suddenly finds herself impoverished and living in a migrant labor camp. In their mission statement, they clearly state their objective to challenge and educate, and most of their productions reflect this desire.

> Back in the old days, the philosophy seemed to be that kids should be protected from the ugly side of life. But contemporary artists disagree. "Kids have to face death, divorce and bullies," says Linda Daugherty, a playwright and actress who works regularly with the Dallas Children's Theater. "But if you can show them people on stage who deal with these things and come out okay, it's helpful" (Smith 16).

Despite the creation of two seemingly distinct camps, we do find another group somewhere in the middle.

> Even worse than frightening children would be to leave them without a sense of hope, say many artists. "The main difference between children and adults is that children aren't cynical," explains Hartzell. "So even in the roughest play, you have to leave them with at least one character who's hopeful. After all, why should an 11-year-old just cash it in and say, 'The world is an awful place.' At 28 or 45, you can choose to say, 'The world's just screwed,' but children don't deserve that" (Smith 16).

While sometimes in disagreement as to methodology, no side is malevolent in their intents, neither those focusing solely on entertainment, nor those who believe social issues are as much a reality for children as for adults. "None of these artists is out to shove children's noses into the trash heap of life. 'We're serious people,' Brosius says. 'It's never about shock value or a moment of profanity. There's always a bigger game." (Smith 16) With so much validity on both sides, it is easy to see why one of the nation's prominent children's theatres, The Minneapolis Children's Theatre, is producing both kinds of work.

This history tells us two key things. First it provides us with two clear alternative purposes of children's theatre: To educate and entertain. Repeatedly throughout this brief history we find the theatre being employed to these ends. We see theatre in communities and in the classroom, as a tool to teach language and values. Moreover, we find it is the educators who are most responsible for the advancement of children's theatre throughout much of the twentieth century. At the same time, we often see elaborate costumes and sets being employed for the purpose of spectacle rather then message. With such a mixed history and with two substantially different approaches to children's theatre, it becomes necessary for children's theatre professionals to construct his/her own goals for this particular art form. As a designer, I firmly believe that my costumes should be designed to intentionally communicate a message to the audience. One of the strategies to achieve effective communication may be to employ spectacular elements in the costumes, but these spectacle elements are only to be employed in service to

communication. Moreover, with much of the history of children's theatre being spectacle focused, perhaps spectacle, or at least elements of spectacle are necessary in successful visual communication. The next chapter will examine one key difference in designing for children rather than adults: The role of experience in perception.

Chapter Two

Visual Literacy for Children

Almost everyone has heard the phrase "A picture is worth a thousand words". In North America, we use the phrase without thinking much about its meaning, but I ask, do we really believe that a picture is worth a thousand words? The structure of our entire society from our educational system to our government is based on the ability to be textually as opposed to visually literate. Indeed, visual literacy is currently being hailed in some quarters as a new discovery, so that we might say, visual literacy is currently worth far less then 1000 words. However, visual literacy is important, especially for children who rely on it as communication tool. This chapter will discuss: (1) visual literacy as a viable tool for learning, (2) the relationship between visual literacy and successful costume design, and (3) the effect of experience on visual perception.

Visual Literacy

In the past ten years, many scholars focused on elementary education have begun to rethink traditional approaches to teaching. The term visual literacy is now acknowledged, even if not yet utilized, in more mainstream sectors of education. Teachers are beginning to recognize images as viable tools for learning. A 1973 study by Wilder and Levin demonstrated that children "learn pictures more easily

than words in a discrimination task" (Levin, Ghatala, and Wilder 1). Another study by Britta Bull and Merlin Wittrock, focused on students' retention rate of eighteen nouns. Students were given the opportunity to learn the nouns through one of three methods (1) self-discovered imagery (2) given imagery (3) verbal definition.

> The verbal definition group or control group was told to learn each definition by reading the words and writing them down repeatedly during the allotted interval. The "imagery given" group received words, definitions, and illustrations. They were instructed to read the word and definition and then write it down once and then to trace its picture. The "imagery discovery" group was to follow the instruction given to the second group but instead of tracing the given illustration were to draw a pictorial representation of the word and its definitions. It was found after due respect to statistical cautions that the retention rate was better when 10-year-old children "discovered and drew idiosyncratic images to represent nouns and their verbal definition." (Bull and Wittrock 289).

Both of these experiments clearly demonstrate the value of visual learning; however, these are not the sole examples. Other experiments have also demonstrated that children do indeed learn through images, showing that the pictures in a children's story book hold educational worth and not simply entertainment value. Some of the best research I have found dealing with visual literacy and children has focused on

picture books. Nikolajeva and Scott state, "Picturebooks successfully combining the imagery and the symbolic, the iconic and the conventional, have achieved something that no other literary form has mastered" (262). Yet, successful costume design achieves many of the same results. Therefore, I have found research on picture books to be particularly exciting.

The similarities between theatre costume design and picture books are numerous. Both employ a visual medium to tell a story through a series of ever changing still frames. Moreover, unlike text, which is linear in its progression, the visual imagery used in both of these mediums instead presents its content all at once, at the same time, and draws the audience into the still frame, requiring them to look deeper into an image in order to extract a story. Despite their differences, the textual and visual aspects of picture books are inseparable, as are the costume and dialogue of a play. Nikolajeva and Scott describe it this way:

> Whichever we start with, the verbal or the visual, it creates expectations for the other, which in turn provides new experiences and new expectations. The reader turns from verbal to visual and back again, in an ever-expanding concentration of understanding. [. . .] Presumably children know this by intuition when they demand that the same book be read aloud to them over and over again. Actually, they do not read the same book; they go more and more deeply into its meaning. Too often adults have lost the ability to read picture books

> in this way, because they ignore the whole and regard the illustrations as merely decorative. This most probably has to do with the dominant position of verbal, especially written, communication in our society, although this is on the wane in generations raised on television and now computers (2).

In essence, we find ourselves with an interconnected relationship between the visual and textual. Too often in the adult world, the visual aspect of the relationship is ignored, a sort of stepchild of the written text, ever present yet unacknowledged. Young children who are still refining their verbal skills can not afford to ignore the language of imagery.

Were we to interview children under the age of twelve, the importance of visual literary for children becomes apparent. Amy, age 5, says, "I always remember the pictures. I sometimes forget words" (Arizpe and Styles 77). After reading Anthony Browne's Zoo, a story told through both word and picture, Erin, age 7, comments of the pictures "He [Browne: The Author] doesn't just want to say the animals want to be free- blah, blah, blah. He leaves you to find it out a bit better. . . makes you keep thinking about things" (Arizpe and Styles 77). Why are these visual elements so important to children? Not only do children store information visually, as described in the introduction, but many children are also still developing verbal language skills; basic reading, or even textual meaning, can present needless boundaries for young children that imagery can surpass.

Interestingly, children in our developmental age bracket, ages 4-11, have visual perception equal to an adult. However, children and adults are still not on equal footing and do view the world differently. Developmental disparities impact the visual processing, although not the basic receipt of visual information, and account for these difference. Thousands of books have been written on child development and the subject is clearly far too expansive to be addressed compactly in this paper. For this reason, I have chosen to examine the role of **experience** in perception, for this is the factor which most strongly affects a child's reaction to a visual stimulus and differentiates it from a similar adult experience.

Also, I should note here that there is a scarcity of research on visual perception regarding signification of elements such as color, shape, and size as they pertain to adults, to say nothing of to children, and literally nothing of to children as they perceive costume. Some of the studies quoted in this thesis are perhaps dated scientifically, but have no recent confirmations or refutations. In part, what this thesis is asking for is a renewed interest and research in visual perception as it pertains to children. In the meantime, it is my hope that the reader will understand the larger purpose of the material cited is to stimulate both scientists and artists to examine more closely the role of perception in human visual reception theory generally and in children in particular. That said, let us turn to the subject of experience.

The Role of Experience in Perception

New parents are amazed by the rapid rate of infant development. One of the key factors in this rapid development is experience. Several experiments on chimpanzees have demonstrated the role of experience in development. One such experiment took place at the Yerkes Laboratories of Primate Biology in Orange Park, Florida, where two newborn chimpanzees were housed in a completely darkened room for sixteen months. Their only exposure to light consisted of an electric light turned on for forty-five seconds several times daily in order to facilitate their routine care and feeding.

> When they were first tested for visual perception at the age of 16 months, both chimpanzees showed extreme incompetence. Their reflex responses indicated that their eyes were sensitive to light--the pupils constricted; sudden changes of illumination startled the animals; they responded to a slowly waving flashlight with jerky pursuit movements of the eyes and side to side following motions of the head. But both chimpanzees failed to show any visual responses to complex patterns of light until after they had spent many hours in illuminated surroundings. They did not respond to play objects or their feeding bottles unless these touched some part of the body. They did not blink at a threatening motion toward the face. When an object was advanced slowly toward the face, there was no reaction until the object

> actually touched the face, and then the animal gave a startled jump. (Hartley and Hartley 230).

However, as Hartley and Hartley point out, what characterizes this study is not the visual inacuity of the chimpanzees -- this was expected, but rather their inability to organize their visual perceptions.

> Note that the animals not only assigned no meaning to objects presented visually (a finding we would expect), but also gave no evidence that they perceived them in any organized way, that is, as other than variations in light and shade. It was not until they had been exposed many times to the same patterns of light and shade that they showed any organizing tendency. This suggests that the repetition of certain unvarying relationships within a context of shifting relationships is one of the factors that organizes our visual precepts [...]We are forced to conclude that whatever organization our precepts have is the result of our repeated interaction with the objects of the external world" (Hartley and Hartley 230, 232).

Although, we may safely assume that our child-based theatre audience has not been housed in complete darkness for the past sixteen months, this study has important implications for children's theatre costume design. It tells us that we learn to see. By uncovering the relationship between experience and visual perception, the finding alerts us to the fact that children, having years less experience and less

repeated interaction with the visual world, will likely perceive visual stimuli differently than adults.

Piaget's theory linking thought and experience supports this claim. According to Piaget, "Children act upon the world through their senses and develop hypotheses based on the consequences of their actions" (quoted in Arizpe and Styles, 30). In other words, it is not that children in this age bracket are actually physically experiencing anything different than an adult, but rather that they "lack the mental operations to make sense of what they see" (Arizpe and Styles 31).

Wood's observation is demonstrated not only by scientific studies, but also by observing children's art work. Four, five, and six-year-old children often depict the human body as a head with arms and legs. It is not uncommon for children of this age to ignore the core body in its entirety. It is not that young children are unable to see the core body, but rather it is perceived as unimportant. However, by the time children are eight or nine we find drawings of humans include the head, core body, and extremities. Such a simple observation suggests that a child's perception and various assigned values of the human form evolve as they age. Therefore, a designer of children's theatre must note the focal points for children of various ages. For example, a design for a show targeting 4 and 5 year olds should focus on the head and extremities of the characters as the communicatory elements in the costume design. This is of course not to say the rest of the body should be ignored in the design

process. Rather the insight allows us to increase the effectiveness of our costume as a whole.

Analysis of the role of experience in perception yields still more information for the children's theatre costume designer. At the Rose in Omaha, designer Sherri Gerdes notes that the younger the audience, the greater the necessity for costumes that are literal. Children do not always have relevant experiences and memories to draw on and therefore often have difficulty understanding messages with which they are unfamiliar and that are portrayed through non-literal means. One example of a non-literal portrayal difficult for children to understand is irony. Kummerling-Meibauer explains:

> Children do not acquire a full understanding of this concept [irony] in comparison to other linguistic phenomena until relatively late [...] The groundwork for understanding irony is often laid first not in verbal but in graphic images that act as visual equivalents to tone in oral storytelling and that can serve to play with or cast doubt on a straight faced text (Arizpe and Styles 79).

While Kummerling-Meibauer contends irony can be more easily perceived in a visual image in relation to a textual image, this is still a concept with which many young audience members struggle and should be carefully considered when employed in children's theatre costume design. For example, a wealthy character dressed as pauper to demonstrate that despite his wealth he really has nothing, would be very

difficult for children to understand. The symbolism would be too complex and the message lost. Understanding the great extent to which children look to the visual for meaning makes it imperative that we avoid overly complex, ironic messages that will only confuse a child. It is important in design that children understand the picture we are creating on stage or it is unlikely they will understand the play. Speaking of picture books they have studied in class, three children help clarify their visual quest for understanding:

> Lara [age 10]: The writing doesn't explain everything what you want to think about [...] the writing only explains what the book is about and what is happening, but it doesn't explain what you feel and what they feel. So, I like the pictures better because then you can think more stuff.
>
> Joe [age 10]: I think I found the pictures more interesting really because the text does help me to know what is going on in the family, but the pictures show what it's really like [...]
>
> Male [age 5]: [Pictures are better] cause we can understand it more. We can't read very well, but we can understand it by the pictures. (Arizpe and Styles 81)

This is not to say that a design should be realistic and completely transparent in meaning. Children often enjoy the fantastic. Most cartoon characters are considerably stylized and Jim Henson's Muppets certainly do not resemble your average homo sapien. However, in the theatre, children are supplementing everything they hear with the visual images from the stage. They have the expectation that our pictures, and especially the costumes, will tell the story right along with the script. We as designers must allow for effective communication of determined and intentional meaning or our costumes become nothing more then pointless spectacle.

At this point, it is important to understand that while we need to approach children at a level where they are capable of understanding, we must also be careful not to underestimate this audience. In some ways, children are more perceptive than adults. The same lack of experience which inhibits comprehension, at other times may aid in a more in-depth experience. Preconceived notions regarding how to examine or approach a situation are often less developed for a child than for an adult. Thus children are able to observe more easily visual elements missed by their more experienced counterparts.

Kenneth Clark, an art historian, outlines four phases for appreciating a visual work of art, which in the case of this study applies to elements of stage costume. Familiarity with these four phases may help the designer to understand an audience's processing of the images costumes create. First, Clark states that the art must have an impact on the viewer. He describes an impact as acquiring an overall impression of the picture, including its subject, colour, shape, and composition. The second stage is

scrutiny. In this stage, the viewer closely examines the work. Third, the viewer connects with past experiences (Clark calls this recollection) and relates these experiences to the picture. Finally, the viewer should experience renewal by delving more deeply into the image.

Understanding such a schema is helpful in costume design. Especially with children, who seek out visual images as part of a comprehension strategy, stage one and two can be achieved fairly easily. Phases three and four, recollection and renewal, present a greater challenge.

In stage three, we ask our audiences to recollect previous knowledge and experience. Given child audiences, our analysis demands we account for their limited experience. The costumes must touch on an experience or at least a thread of knowledge common to the members of the audience, a much easier reference point when our audience is in their sixties and seventies, or even twenties and thirties. However, success is possible with the younger demographic as well. One of the best examples of character and costume appealing to children is Sesame Street's Elmo. Elmo is designed to appeal to Sesame Street's audience demographic: Toddlers. Elmo is a three-and-a-half-year-old toddler who speaks in third person, lives in a crayon-drawn apartment and has a blanket he loves dearly. Zoe, Elmo's best friend, is a tutu and barrette wearing, feminine version of Elmo who is obsessed with ballet. She was created in order to capitalize on Elmo's popularity by appealing to preschool girls. Elmo's increased popularity in the last thirty years has even resulted in him hosting the final segment of Sesame Street, "Elmo's World." Here we find the

Everyman of the preschool community. Toddlers love crayons, often speak in the third person and frequently have important blankets or stuffed animals. In addition, a tutu- wearing, ballet-obsessed three-year-old is not uncommon. Even if one individual toddler does not exhibit all or even any of these "average" toddler traits, he/ she will likely have observed another child his own age who does. In addition, assuming the vast majority of the audience successfully makes the connection, the response of the group leads the individual to look for the connection and be alert to similar looks and circumstances in the future. When children, watch the "Elmo's World" segment of Sesame Street, they have experiences in common and thus have the possibility of reaching Clark's phase three, or recollecting previous experiences.

Once phase three is reached, the transition between phase three recollection and phase four renewal or application is natural for the average child. If an image has kept their attention long enough to reach stage three, chances are they will want to re-examine the work. Any parent weary after the two hundredth reading of Cinderella will attest to this fact.

In order to achieve movement between these four stages, designers have a tool box. The main tools found in this tool box are color, form, size, and texture. What follows is a discussion of each of these tools and their application in children's theatre costume design.

Chapter 2

The Designers' Tool Box
Communication Through The Aesthetic

Color

Human beings find color very important. For example, it is not unusual to ask someone their favourite color. Color is especially important to children. What follows is a discussion of the importance of color for children and the effects of color on human beings.

Color is especially important to preschool and young elementary school students and is the strongest tool at the disposal of any designer of children's theatre costumes for an audience under age seven. Multiple scientific studies have demonstrated that while adults use form as a means to discriminate one object from another, young children use color as the main discriminatory factor.

> The classic color-form preference measure is one in which the subject chooses between two alternatives to match a series of objects against a standard. Objects of the same form are different in color, and those of the same color are different in form. The subject must choose between matching either on the basis of color or the basis of form. [...] The median age of transition from color to form dominance is about five, and form dominance is usually established by the age of nine. (Sharpe 8)

However, despite the fact that the transition from color to form dominance is not complete until the age of nine, studies indicate that color is the primary discriminatory factor only until age seven and as discussed earlier previous experience is dominant over both color and form:

> In an effort to parcel out color or form dominance, various representational colored pictures have been shown to preschool children with the request that they match a model. The results indicate that although the relative objective obtrusiveness of color or form is generally the determining factor in what will be abstracted, color tends to be the dominant factor with preschool children. On the other hand, when children over the age of seven are presented with representations of familiar objects, neither color nor form nor size is normally the basis of conceptual similarity. By this time, the representational dimension [experience] has become the dominant form of categorization. (Sharpe 9-10).

After age seven, we find the role of experience taking hold as children begin to apply prior knowledge, their experience, to the way in which they interpret visual mediums. A costume designer's major focus for the under-seven audience should be communication using color as the most important tool.

As Ruth Hubbard discusses in her book Authors of Pictures, Draughtsmen of Words, children themselves use color as a tool to communicate with others. It is therefore no surprise that color is an effective medium through which to communicate

with them. Hubbard goes on to say, "They [children] find that color helps them to communicate, they use it consciously and intentionally" (129). As part of a dissertation, Hubbard spent many hours observing six-year-old students and their drawings. Although her book documents numerous interactions with children and their use of color I have chosen two which I feel especially demonstrate children' employment of color:

> For Claudia, purple is the color that shows happiness. She was pleased to see herself included in Ming's "friend book" and watched as Ming carefully drew Claudia in the black and yellow outfit she was wearing. She looked at the drawing of herself and smiled. "I smile. Happy." She reached into the crayon box, found what she was looking for, and carefully colored in her own face purple. (133-134)

> [Six-year-old Eugene explains his picture.] "This is a big harvest moon. That's why it's orange, or you wouldn't know it was fall." (134)

Such examples clearly demonstrate the symbolic and communicatory value of color for children.

There has only been a limited amount of research conducted on the meaning of color and its effects both psychologically and biologically on the human body. Moreover, much of the research is both dated and conducted using questionable scientific procedures. I employ this research as it is some of the only material

available on the subject matter and caution the reader to critically examine the claims made therein. Should any scholar wish to pursue more scientifically accurate studies in this field, I strongly encourage this pursuit as I believe the science of color should be frequently used by designers in all fields.

Research into color theory demonstrates that the effect of color on human beings is dramatic. In his book Color and Psychology and Color Therapy, Faber Birren states, "Light striking the eye sets up reactions which spread throughout the organism. There may be excitation or depression, a quickening of nervous response or an effect of tranquility. Impressions of pleasure or displeasure may be less associated with spiritual and aesthetic qualities than with the reaction of the brain and, indeed, the entire organism" (139). Birren is not the only individual making such strong claims about the impact of color on human beings. In their work Color and Light In Man-Made Environments, Frank and Rudolph Mahnke also attest to color's significance. They observe:

> Color, which is created by light, is therefore a form of energy, and this energy affects body function just as it influences mind and emotion. Today, thanks to sophisticated techniques of research and analysis, we know that color affects cortical activation (brain waves), functions of the autonomic nervous system (which regulates the body's internal environment), and hormonal activity, and that color arouses definite emotional and aesthetic associations. In short, our response to color is total; it influences us both psychologically and physiologically (1).

Color affects us physically, emotionally and psychologically. Numerous studies have been conducted on the use of color in man made environments with impressive findings. In 1978, a mental health center in Chula Vista, California, treating emotionally disturbed children and adolescents hired a team of color-psychology designers to develop a new color plan for the center. At the time, the facility was faced with vandalism generated by many of the patients. "The remodelling started in early 1979, one unit at a time. As each unit was completed, the vandalism there diminished. By the conclusion of the project, the destruction had declined to almost nothing. The deliberate angry demolition of property simply had ended" (Mahnke and Mahnke 98). As of the publication of the book, six years later, vandalism remained at an all time low.

> The plan made use of a variety of colors. Most of these were pastel orange, yellows, peach, light green, turquoise, and blue (in incidental areas) – interspersed with rust and copper. In the children's corridor yellow and orange contrasted with cooler colors on the doors and door frames. The adolescent patient rooms alternately had cool and warm tones so the staff could try to assign introverted personality types to surroundings that suited them best (Mahnke and Mahnke 98).

The book describes in detail the employment of color to create a calming environment for the patients. However, although as designers there may be specific instance where we seek to calm and soothe our audiences, more often we seek to accomplish just the opposite. For example, Disney's original Cinderella wears a

pastel blue ball gown, a very calming color immediately following a point in the movie when she has just experienced the trauma of her evil stepsisters and evil stepmother ripping her clothes and banning her from the ball. The blue gown helps us transition to the calmness and romance of the ball. Given the effect of colors used in one specific case, let us turn our attention to color effects as a whole. We will examine major hues on an individual basis and then will proceed to a discussion of color combinations and color use as a whole. To begin, let us briefly address the issue of cultural heritage and its effect on color perception.

Culture, or the behaviors and beliefs of a particular social, ethnic, or age group, in addition to one's geographic region, religion, economic factors, and even individual experience and association, affects the way colors are perceived. The examples are numerous. In the United States, it is considered good luck to married in white and white signifies virginity (http://www.infoplease.com/spot/colors1.html). However, in Asian countries colors have different meanings. For example, white is the color of mourning in China and Japan (http://www.infoplease.com/spot/colors1.html). However, insomuch as the intent of this paper is not a sociological one, the following statements regarding color refer only to color's apparent more universal effects.

Despite differences in the cultural perception of color, red still raises the blood pressure of human beings, regardless of race, creed, or culture. "Red increases blood pressure [. . .] Green and blue decrease blood pressure" (Birren, 150). Mahnkc and Mahnke state, "Yet, taking all the research collectively, we can state safely that there

are universal elements in color where broad appeal as a practical necessity is an attainable goal" (11). Küller agrees saying:

> One of the most striking features of the results concerning preferences, connotations and color-mood associations is the consistency from one individual to another, from group to group and cross-culturally. There has been a great number of cross-cultural studies comparing subjects in America, Lebanon, Kenya, Botswana, Greece, just to mention a few [. . .] men [have been compared] to women, children to adults, laymen to architects. As one author concludes: "It would indicate either that our heritage is such that we learn the correct responses or that there is some innate mood reaction to different colors" (Mahnke and Mahnke 11).

Let us assume, then, that while there are definite differences in color perceptions, there are also numerous universal elements worthy of consideration by anyone working with color.

Red

We will begin with red, as it is generally considered to be the most dominant color. Red is also the color of fire, and humans exposed to red experience an initial increase in blood pressure and heart rate. (Birren 150) The idea of warmth and then by default love, passion, and anger (bodies literally feel warm when they experience these emotions) are often also associated with red. "Feré discovered that red

increased muscular tension from a normal 23 units to 42" (Birren 130). This finding suggests that red is a stimulating color.

Orange

According to the work of Mahnke and Mahnke, orange is frequently associated with being alert, positive and sociable (Mahnke and Mahnke 12). Interestingly, when comparing color preferences of extraverts and introverts we find that extraverts prefer warmer colors. Thus, a connotation between sociable and orange is a scientific conclusion rather then a randomly assigned association. "The convivial favour orange. Color preference is something of a clue to personality" (Birren 171). Orange also has wavelengths longer then any color, other then red. Colors with longer wavelengths have been scientifically proven to be more arousing on visual cortical activity and functions of the autonomic nervous system, than colors with shorter wavelengths, such as blue or green (Birren 172). In conclusion, we find scientific evidence for color connotations, specifically between orange and alertness.

Yellow

Yellow is a very light color and as it loses its lightness it ceases to remain yellow. It will become another color. For example, secondary colors made by mixing yellow paint are always darker then yellow and no longer remain yellow. This lightness leads to connotations of cheerfulness and high spirits (Mahnke and Mahnke 12). Humans feeling this way often literally use the expression "I feel so

light I could fly." This is another way to say that one is happy or in good spirits. Yellow is also associated with the sun (the color it often appears in the sky) and with radiance, another sun connection. Yellow has also been known as glaring (the sun) and egocentric (what does the world revolve around?) (Birren 170).

Green

Green is relaxing. Why? People looking at green experience a withdrawal of stimulus. It is considered the color of nature (Birren 170). "One of the most widely known and quoted studies on the effect of color surroundings is that by K. Goldstein, in which he found that a limited number of brain-damaged cases responded 'expansively' to red and 'contractively' to green. Further he found his patients responded in an excited manner to red and in a calm manner to green" (Sharpe 84). Green also makes time appear shorter and objects lighter. "Under the influence of green or blue light, time is likely to be underestimated [. . .] under red lights, weights will be judged heavier; under green light they will be judged lighter" (Birren 146).

Blue

Blue is the opposite of red. "Blue has qualities that are antithetical to red" (Birren 260). It is associated with calmness, peacefulness, and coldness (Mahnke and Mahnke 12). Its appearance is cool and wet. In human organisms blue lowers blood pressure and decreases heart rate (Birren 150). Like our other examples,

biological effects and color perceptions are entwined: A decrease in pulse and blood pressure can make the human organism feel cold, peaceful, and calm.

Purple

Purple is composed of the two most physiologically and psychologically opposed colors: red and blue. "Purple being a blend of red and blue, the two extremes of the spectrum, is more or less neutral biologically" (Birren 170). Therefore purple has been associated with mysticism, power, loneliness, and confusion ((Mahnke and Mahnke 12). All these associations make sense when one envisions the combinations of such polar opposites.

The comments made in regards to color are made on the basis of universal biology and psychology; a designer familiar with the culture of the audience can go much deeper into specific cultural meanings of color for the audience members and may use color far beyond the scope of what is outlined above.

A designer will often use many colors in a production. Therefore, it is important to examine not only the effects of individual colors on the general population, but also the effects of color combinations as a unit. Research devoted to color in interior design is almost unanimous in its avocation of reasonable color variety. The rationale is simple: one color used repeatedly is fatiguing for the entire body. Ironically, too many colors and patterns have the same effect. (Mahnke and Mahnke 98-99). Extreme color unity is likened to sensory deprivation, whereas

extreme complexity is said to be over stimulating. Color-over-stimulation can cause "changes in the rate of breathing, pulse rate, and blood pressure; increases in muscle tension; psychiatric reactions of varying types; and probably compounded medical consequences, such as increased susceptibility to infection, coronary disease, and ulcers" (Mahnke and Mahnke 4-5). Over-stimulation has been shown to cause, "restlessness, excessive emotional response, difficulty in concentration, irritation, and, in some cases a variety of more extreme reactions" (Mahnke and Mahnke 5). We find that under stimulation is not relaxing or even boring, but rather can also produce the anxiety, fear, and distress associated with over-stimulation. Küller conducted an experiment on six men and six women, placing three of each gender in two different rooms. One room was entirely white and grey, the other room was described as "Colorful and diversified." However, after six hours the individuals in the white and grey room experienced a lack of emotional control, a higher level of alpha-brain wave activity on the EEG, and higher EKG readings than those individuals in the colorful room, who maintained normal readings. Although the experiment did not test individuals in a high intensity single color room, based on the Mahnke and Mahnke documented reaction of color over-stimulation, it is safe to assume that individuals in an intense single-color room would have reacted similarly to those in white and grey room.

Costume designers might well investigate such studies because they both give clues on how to elicit specific emotions and yet also provide information to the

designer which should discourage under-and-over stimulation, a result which will render costumes ineffective.

Form

Form is yet another tool at the disposal of the designer. We've seen that the average human being is form dominant by the age of nine-years-old. Thus, while color always remains a crucial element of the design, form becomes increasingly important as the audience age increases. As a result, the designs for a show targeting preschool students might focus more on color, whereas the designs for a show targeting fourth and fifth graders, (nine to eleven-year-olds) might have a more intense form focus. Form is used in costume design in the creation of both pattern and in silhouette. Silhouette is the outline or general shape of an object; in costuming this would refer to the overall shape of the character.

Unfortunately, unlike color, less scientific attention has been paid to form preferences. While at least some research has been dedicated to size, there has been very little research on emotional response to geometric shape. There are studies that make general observations on the human reaction to form but few concrete scientific studies analysing the why of our reaction. Molly Bang's Picture This: Perception and Composition is perhaps a useful reference. Although the subject is picture books

rather than clothing or costume, once again the similarities between our previous two media forms provide us insight. Bang summarizes her observations as follows:

1. Smooth, flat, horizontal shapes give us a sense of stability and calm.

2. Vertical shapes are more exciting and more active.

3. Diagonal shapes are dynamic because they imply motion or tension.

4. The upper half of a picture is a place of freedom, happiness, and triumph; objects placed in the top half often feel more "spiritual." The bottom half feels more threatened, heavier, sadder, or more constrained; objects placed in the bottom half also feel more "grounded."

5. The center of the page is the most effective "center of attention." It is the point of greatest attraction. The edges and corners of pictures are the edges and corners of the picture world. [This is not true in costuming, where the head is the focus and not the belly button.]

6. White or light backgrounds feel safer to us than dark backgrounds because we can see well during the day and only poorly at night.

7. We feel more scared looking at pointed shapes; we feel more secure looking at rounded shapes or curves.

8. The larger an object is in a picture, the stronger it feels.

9. We associate the same or similar colors much more strongly than we associate the same or similar shapes.

10. We notice contrasts, or put another way, contrast enables us to see. (Bang 56-110)

Bang's comments create a clear overview of some basic form conceptions. Most are quite logical, certainly not requiring expertise and many of these observations are things already comprehended and even employed in the daily life of the average human. After all, who decorates their toddler's room in dark, sharp, angular patterns? However, the simplicity of Bang's observations does not diminish their importance for effective costume design. A designer does well to keep such basic observations ever at hand during the design process.

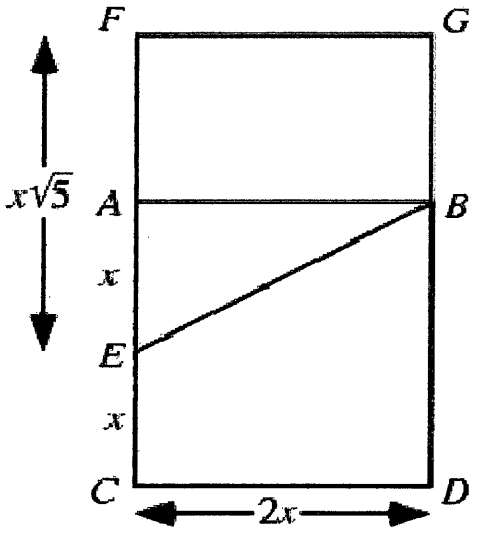
In order to further advance this discussion, I have chosen three geometric shapes to discuss in greater detail. These shapes are: the quadrilateral, the curvilinear shapes, and the triangle. Yet, geometric shapes alone are not the sole elements of form; size also plays an important role and will conclude this section with comments on size perception.

Once again my attempt here is not to focus on the whole milieu of form perception within the realms of culture. This is far too expansive a topic for the purposes of this paper. Let it suffice to say that utilizing cultural elements and symbols can be very effective. I leave it to the costume designer to understand and effectively employ the cultural perceptions of their intended audience. Instead, what follows, as with the preceding discussion of a color, is a more universal examination of the perception of form.

Rectangle:

The rectangle, a shape with four sides, four vertices, and two sets of parallel sides symbolizes stability and security (http://mathworld.wolfram.com). Podiums and buildings are often rectangles. Buildings provide shelter and safety against the outside world. A podium empowers an individual, delineating him/her as the one to whom others should listen.

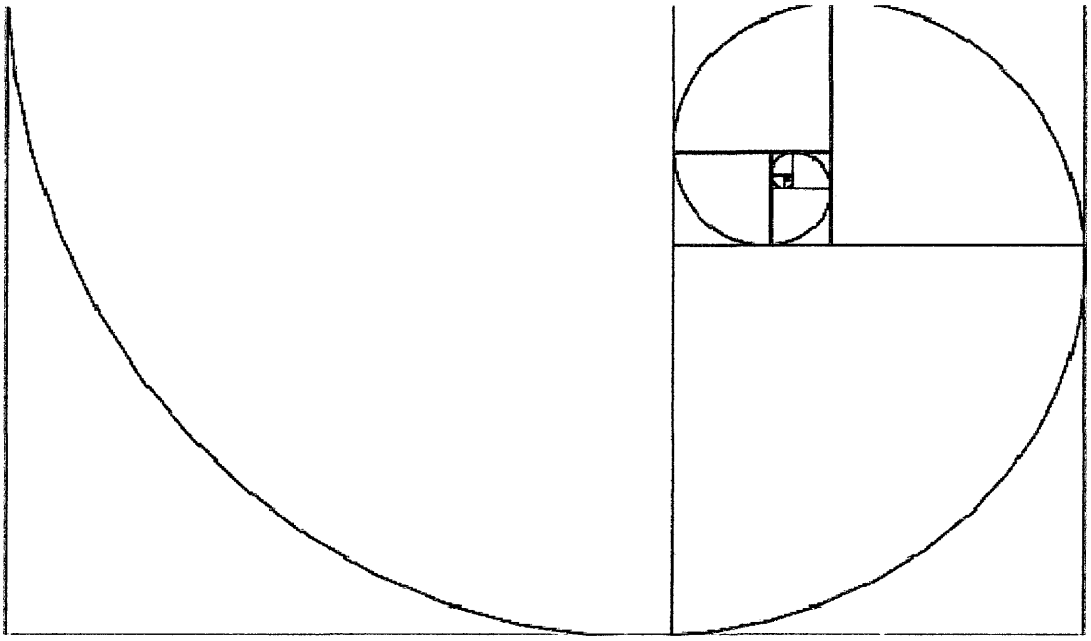
The classification rectangle also houses one of mathematics greatest mysteries: the golden rectangle. The golden rectangle is a rectangle with the ratio of width to height at 1:1.618 (Weisstein http://mathworld.wolfram.com). Below is a picture of the golden rectangle.



(Weisstein http://mathworld.wolfram.com)

What makes this rectangle unique is that one may remove a square from the rectangle and the remaining rectangle will retain the golden proportion 1:1.618. One may continue to do this perpetually. However, the golden rectangle is more than some

factoid in a trivia game; the golden rectangle and its derivative the golden spiral,[1] pictured below, are repeatedly seen in art and nature. We find these golden shapes in everything from sea shells to the Parthenon.



(Weisstein http://mathworld.wolfram.com)

This said, there has been a great deal of discussion over the actual frequency of the golden rectangle and the golden spiral in nature. Some authors credit everything from solar systems to sunflowers as based on this ratio, whereas other mathematicians discount these claims saying that logarithmic spirals are not the same or even related to golden spirals. Despite this academic mathematical debate, one undeniable fact is that artists and architects have, for at least several thousand years, employed the

[1] The golden spiral is a derivative of the golden rectangle. A golden spiral increases in width by an equal factor every quarter-turn it makes.

golden rectangle in their work, and moreover it is widely considered to be aesthetically pleasing.

Knowing that the shape is considered aesthetically pleasing makes sense in connection with our original assertion that quadrilaterals are considered to be safe and strong. People feel comforted and protected by the rectangle. It has neither the motion of the circle nor the sharp edges of the triangle.

We can apply this knowledge to costume design in both patterning and silhouette, the shape of a garment on the body. Therefore, a stronger character might wear a suit jacket which is rectangular in shape. "The suit, the rock upon which the professional man's wardrobe is founded, constructs the public persona it asserts status, establishes identity, and announces intentions" (Rubinstein 247). As the suit jacket is a power symbol within our own society, this power symbol would communicate power from the stage as well.

Triangle

Despite the strength associated with the rectangle, likely linked more to its familiarity and security then actual muscle strength, the triangle is in fact the strongest geometric shape. However, it is viewed as not only strong, but also mystical even to the point of being considered evil and dangerous. The Egyptian pyramids are a prime example of the use of a triangle in both a strong and mystical sense. The western Christian also uses the more mystical qualities associated with the triangle to depict the trinity. By contrast, the Nazi's utilized the triangle during World War II to label specific people they wanted ostracized from society:

The colors of the triangles were as follows:

yellow for Jews,	black for anti-socials,
red for politicals,	purple for Jehovah's Witnesses,
green for criminals,	blue for emigrants,
pink for homosexuals,	brown for Gypsies.

(Heger 31)

These outcast individuals were forced to wear the triangle in the same way the Jews were forced to wear a yellow star. The triangle helped facilitate the idea that these groups were dangerous, powerful, and evil.

In children's theatre costume design, the triangle can be used to show mysticism or even to add danger and a sense of unease to a costume.

Curvilinear Shapes:

The curvilinear shape, any figure consisting of a perimeter of curved lines, is a much softer shape then either the quadrilateral or the triangle. We are not stabbed or poked by curves. Curvilinear shapes, particularly the circle, are associated with being constant. There is no end. This is often why circles are used in religious iconology. Also, the cyclical progression of days and seasons allows a universal association of the circle and nature.

The symbolic elements of these shapes can and should be used in costume design. In the next paragraph, I will discuss a potential extension of these shapes to

the area of design but I also want to caution the reader that these ideas, while employing commonly accepted emotional responses to geometric shape, lack the strict scientific support that would link these shapes to any real measurable emotional response or identify them with their assigned suggested gender roles as discussed below. In that regard, I am speculating and ask the reader's indulgence.

Ethics of gender stereotyping aside, I strongly believe that shape can be used to portray gender and gender associations in costume design. For example, the rectangle associates itself with characteristics typically viewed as masculine, in the 20th century western world. Traditionally, men build houses; men are the leaders standing on the podiums, men are the ones expected to protect the family, and be the leader in the home. Interestingly, a rectangle also approximates the stereotypical western and especially U.S. media-made male upper body: square shoulders proceeding into a straight and rectangular chest, and only veering in slightly for the waist and hips. A lot can be observed from what we look like when we feel we are dressed our best. In the United States, when men want to look their best, whether it is for a wedding or other special occasion, they often wear a suit. The suit is a compelling example of men's clothing employed to accentuate the rectangular quality of the male figure, once again implying masculine qualities are associated with the rectangle.

The circle, however, seems to possess a more traditional feminine quality in its constancy and cyclical quality. Women have traditionally been expected to be faithful and loyal in their relationships. Traditional women's work, such as laundry

and house cleaning is very cyclical in nature. Even the process of bearing a child is cyclical.

All these are qualities associated with the sphere. Even physically the woman can be seen to resemble the curvilinear shape. Her upper body curves in and out through the shoulders waist and hips, and resembles a series of spheres rather than a rectangle. Women seeking to gain the support and attention of men, such as high school girls on prom night, tend to wear clothing that accentuates their feminine form. By contrast, women seeking to gain political power or leadership will often employ the quadrilateral shape. Hilary Clinton and Nancy Pelosi, for example, often wear the quadrilateral shape of a suit.

(www.prom-dress.com)

www.international.mq.edu.au/globe

www.sfgate.com

I add my own observations to Molly Bang's in the hope that these kinds of observations might provide greater insight for the reader. The use of geometric shapes both as silhouettes and as prints and embellishments can be employed very effectively by the children's theatre costume designer. For example, jovial people are

often depicted as round: Santa Claus, Cinderella's Fairy Godmother, and the Easter Bunny. However, shape is not the only element of form. Size is also an important form element and can dramatically affect the audience perception of a character.

Size

Size is another important aspect of form. However, it is one of the most difficult aspects to control effectively because there is great variation in the way people perceive size. After completing a study where individuals were asked to estimate size, John D. Hundleby et al. commented, "It would appear that each individual has a differentially calibrated 'mental telescope' for estimating width. Quite possibly this general tendency also extends to height and three-dimensional size; however, no proof of this exists" (Hundleby, Misumi, Kampen, and Keating 233). However, despite these individual differences in perception, we find that the idea of error in width estimation is not at all uncommon. Hence, people buy clothes based on a numbered size rather then an appearance of size. This said, studies indicate the one commonality among most individuals is the tendency to overestimate rather then underestimate size. Although studies on width estimation have focused on everything from cereal boxes to wooden mannequins, I have found the studies focusing on estimation of the human form to be the most insightful. These studies revealed that the body part with the greatest error in body width estimation is the head. Most people seem to feel the head is bigger than its actual size (Hundleby, Misumi, Kampen, and Keating 233). Although at birth an infants head is 25% of the

overall body length, by the time an individual reaches adulthood, the head is just over 13% of the overall body length. This likely affects children's identification with a character and may explain the large proportion of children's cartoon characters with unrealistic proportions. For example, Humpty Dumpty, Sponge Bob, and the Brat Doll all have heads not fitting the standard adult head to body size ratio. For the costume designer this has substantial implications. The head is seen by the audience as quite literally larger then life. As previously discussed, young children, often depicting a person by their head and extremities, have an especially keen focus on the head. Yet, ironically, many times the head is more of an afterthought than a focus in the costume design process. In my theatre experience, I have witnessed many productions where at dress rehearsal, after weeks of work on an intricate costume covering the rest of the body, the designer is still working out the details of the character's head, be it a hair style, wig, hat, make-up, or more elaborate embellishment. It is not even uncommon for a first dress rehearsal to be 'costume only,' as if somehow whatever is on an actor's head is not part of the costume. What a gross error this is on behalf of a designer. Despite the fact that it is less then 1/8 the size of the rest of the body, research clearly demonstrates that an audience, especially a child based audience, will focus on the character's head, viewing it on average as 25% bigger than its actual size. This makes the head, at least in my estimation, a very significant part of the design, quite a lot bigger than an afterthought.

Also of note is Yi Fu Tuan's book Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience. In this book Tuan discusses space as a concept directly related to the body. He says:

> [If] we look for fundamental principles of spatial organization, we find them in two kinds of facets: the posture and structure of the human body, and the relations whether close or distant, between human beings. Man, out of his intimate experience with his body and with other people, organizes space so that it conforms with and caters to his biological and social relations. (34)

Hubbard also addresses this idea, discussing how many spatial relationship and measurement terms are derivatives of the human body. Examples include foot, digit, elbow room, and stone's throw (how far a man could throw a stone). This correlation between size perception and the human body is evidenced further when we consider that the individuals most accurate in their width estimations were those who had experienced a dramatic shift in their own personal size, for example, those who had lost a dramatic amount of weight. These individuals were more accurate not only in their own personal body estimations, but also regarding objects unrelated to their own bodies (Hundleby, Misumi, Kampen, and Keating 233). Children, depending on age, can be substantially smaller than a full grown adult. Knowing that humans often judge size in relation to their own body may cause the children's theatre costume designer to cater size aspects of a design to the size of a child rather then an adult. For example, a four-foot-tall character will seem short to the average adult, but much

taller to young children. In the play The Wizard of Oz, Munchkins taller than the children in the audience will not seem at all short.

Understanding the way in which people perceive size is important for the children's costume designer; however, it is also important to know how people react to size. One of the most interesting studies available on this topic focuses on the human reaction to various media display sizes. The study tested 132 people, with a roughly equal balance between men and women. The median age was 20 years old:

> The experiment involved presenting images to small groups of viewers in a special screening room. Each picture was projected onto a screen for 6 seconds, and participants rated their emotional responses to the images immediately after viewing. In a between-subjects design, we made two experimental manipulations of how the images were presented. Participants saw either small (22" diagonally) or large (90") images and either moving or still images. [. . .] All 60 pictures were presented in every condition, so that each picture could serve as its own control. The basic design required that small groups of participants view 60 pictures in one of four conditions and rate their emotional responses following each one (Detenber 72).

The study found the following:

> The results of the experiment indicate that image size positively affects the arousal and dominance dimensions of emotional responses [...]

> Specifically, pictures seen as large images elicit stronger feelings of arousal than the same pictures seen as small images. Because arousal is widely regarded as a primitive and automatic response to stimuli in one's environment, a plausible explanation for the effect is that the larger images constitute more compelling and significant stimuli. Big pictures are not just larger images or representations, they are also bigger things. Images certainly have symbolic significance, but at a more primitive level people respond to their nonrepresentational aspects as well.
>
> In terms of Lang's bio-informational theory, the increased arousal was an adaptive response to stimuli that are close enough to real-world counterparts, that is, big things, to be consequential to the organism (Detenber 77).

The important factor in this study is not the actual images themselves, but rather the effect of size on perception. Even if an individual were to be shown an image generally accepted as provocative, this study concludes that the provocative image on the larger screen will prove more arousing than that on the smaller screen, The results of this experiment demonstrate that larger images are more arousing. More arousing, inturn, can translate into either more engaging in a positive sense or more intimidating in a negative sense. The costume designer can use this information in their work. Portraying a large villain may be effective with older children, but may

be too frightening for a younger audience. Large objects can also grab attention in a comical way. For example, clowns often have big nose, big buttons, and big shoes. Also, the use of a small object can emphasize the size of a related object. A small hat will make a persons head appear larger. We find the disproportionate use of size comical. However, big does not have to be bad or comical. "Infants show a preference for larger objects in a presentation (Fantz, Fagan, & Miranda, 1975); height in men is related to physical attractiveness, income, and occupational status (Jackson, 1992); and estimates of productivity are influenced by physical size (Josephs, Giesler, & Silvera, 1994)" (Detenbar 68). Thus, society has many positive connotations with big. In terms of costume design, the designer must remember that the bigger the character or actor in relation to their surroundings the higher level of arousal for the audience.

These examples demonstrate that form, size, and color are important tools at the disposal of a designer. When used effectively they can elicit both biological and emotional responses from an audience, effectively inviting the audience to experience the story in a more intense and personal way.

The final tool available to the costume designer is texture. It like the other two tools can be a very effective element of the design.

Texture and Fabric Properties

> There is a saying 'you can't see the wood for the trees': a similar phrase might be developed for textiles. To say what it is, is very hard, but as soon as an explanation is begun it seems to never end. Textiles is [sic] so many things that it might best be understood through experience, gradually, approached with an open mind. Each person comes to his or her own understanding of what textiles is [sic] and in this lies its charm and its power. At the simplest level it is no more than a piece of cloth and perhaps that is where everybody must begin. (Gale, and Kaur 6)

Fabric is woven or knitted fibers, traditionally sold in bolts in widths of 36 inches, 45 inches, 60 inches, 72 inches, 108 inches, or 120 inches. The fibers composing fabric may be natural or synthetic (man-made). Lace, satin, wool, and cotton are some of the hundreds of fabrics available to a costume designer. Technological advances increase the types of fabric available almost yearly. Now we can obtain fabric with glass and fiber optic components. Competitive swimmers pay hundreds of dollars for a swim suit that channels water and reduces drag. A costume designer is no longer limited to fabric in their creation of texture. Designers often use nontraditional fibers such as metal or plastic as part of their work in addition to more traditional embellishments such as beads and feathers.

Like color, size, and form, the textures used in a costume also send messages and tell stories. Texture is an expansive topic. The smallest detail can have a significant effect. Briefly let us examine fabric as it is traditionally one of the basic elements creating a texture.

Textiles are composed of five basic parts: Fibers, Yarns, Construction, Color, and Finishing. Fiber is the foundation of fabric. The fiber can be natural or man made and there are numerous subcategories. Each of these various subcategories possesses within it certain distinctions, which in turn affect various fiber properties. Even within the category of fiber there are both filaments, or long smooth fibers, and staples or light fibers of differing lengths. After we have established our fiber, we must decide if it is the sole fiber used in a fabric. Fabrics often times utilize different warp and weft fibers. Already we find elements that will greatly impact the texture of the final product. The type of fiber chosen will affect the overall appearance of the garment. For example, the ostrich puppet in the University of Nebraska's production The Ostrich Project had a beak made of foam coated with polyurethane. This fabric caused the beak to appear hard. By contrast, the head was covered in a polyester single knit, with a pile woven crosswise, causing the head to have a texture resembling feathers. This is a demonstration of the effectiveness of appropriate fiber choice.

Next the fibers are usually spun, although they may also be riddled, loose, carded, combed, or felted. The thickness of the spun fiber, listed from thinnest to

thickest, determines what it is called: Fiber → Thread → Yarn → Cord → Cable. Fibers are twisted to make threads, more fibers or threads are twisted to make yarn, strands of yarn are twisted to make cord, strands of cord are twisted to make cable. Fabric can be composed of any of these various thickness or twists of fibers. Some fibers such as silk or polyester have no twist, but many fibers are twisted as they are spun. Low twist yarns have approximately 2-5 turns per centimeter, have high luster and are often used for napping. The nap of a fabric is the direction that light reflects off the thread or overall fabric. Medium twist yarns have 8-10 turns per centimeter and are generally stronger. It should be noted that as the twist increases, the luster decreases because a tighter twist allows less space for light absorption. High or hard twist yarns have 12-17 turns per centimeter and are often used in specialty fabrics. Crepe has 17-20 turns per centimeter and is very lively and kinky. Even the twist direction has an effect. Yarn can be twisted in an S twist or clockwise rotation or in a Z twist or a counterclockwise rotation. Understanding the twist and napping of a fabric is important in children's theatre costume design because it allows the designer to utilize light. The way the light plays off a fabric will affect its color, other visual properties such as hardness, and apparent temperature. The fiber type and twist will also affect drapeability, or the way the fabric hangs on the figure. For example, the Tin Woodsman in The Wizard of Oz is costumed to appear metallic, cold, and hard, literally made out of tin. By contrast, Glinda, the Good Witch of the North, appears soft and fluffy. Although her costume also has metallic properties, they are both

limited and contrasted by a warm pink resulting in the audience perceiving them as a magical sparkle rather than coldness.

After a yarn is created, the fabric is then constructed by knitting or weaving together fibers. The appearance of the fabric often depends on its weave, although some fabrics are also knit. Knitting involves the looping of yarn. Sweaters are often knit. Weaving, traditionally done on a loom, involves interlacing threads or yarns. The weave chosen affects the overall appearance of the fabric. Let us look at an example. A plain weave, constructed by yarns which alternately pass over and under each other at right angles, have no right or wrong side and a rather uninteresting texture, although they make great backgrounds for prints (Wolfe 149-150). By contrast, a twill weave, or "a weave in which each warp [vertical yarns] or filling yarn floats across two or more filling or warp yarns with a progression of interlacing, by one to the right or left, forming a distant diagonal, or wale" (Textiles 210), has a far more interesting texture. It is also softer, more pliable, and has greater wrinkle recovery then a plain weave fabric. The children's designer may require a character to wear blue jeans, which are traditionally a twill weave. By understanding the properties of various weaves, the designer is capable of making a knowledgeable decision, which will affect the overall appearance the costume and thus the audience's reaction.

Next, color may be added to the fabric. We have previously discussed the effect of color on costume design, but let us briefly reexamine the context of texture.

In addition to a fabric simply being died or printed with a design there are several other color effects. One such effect is known by several different names such as Chameleon, Changeant, Iridescent, Luminescent, Opalescent, Pearlescent, or Shot. In this effect the vertical yarns are a different color then the horizontal yarns. This causes the color to change as the fabric is moved. Another effect is changeable dye, such as "Sway," developed by Japan's Toray Industries. These dyes have a coating with small capsules of a color which changes reversibly. As a young child I owned a blue shirt with a purple handprint on the front. When I placed my hand on the handprint, the heat would cause the print to change from purple to red. Temperature fluctuations incite this change. Effects produced by Sway Dye and Changeant are very useful in children's theatre. They add an element of magic to a costume. For example, the Wicked Witch of The West in The Wizard of OZ might have a costume made from Changeant fabric, causing the fabric to magically flicker between two colors. Her costume could also have a patch of Sway Dye which would change color from black to red when touched. Such magical changes could evoke surprise from an audience casting a magical spell over the theatre. Fabrics can also be dyed to have an Ombred effect. In this effect a color transitions in lightness or saturation or to another color. Finally, Holography, or the making and use of holograms, is another effect that can produce an interesting textual element. Holograms on a fabric create a colorful, foil-like 3-D display that catches the light in interesting ways.

Fabric undergoes a process called finishing in which it is chemically treated to make it suitable for its intended use. Jean can be bleached. Fabric can be distressed.

Whether for fashion sake or practicality, these finishing processes can dramatically alter the look of a fabric (Wolfe 168-169).

It is important for a designer to understand the process by which textiles are created in order to understand some of the various textural effects which can influence the way a fabric is received. There are two effects created during the textile process which I feel are especially of note. They are the absorption and reflection of light and the use of pattern.

Reflection and Absorption of Light

One of the most important characteristics of texture affecting its visual perception is its ability to either absorb or reflect light. Sequins, satin weaves, and metallic fibers are all examples of textural means whereby light is reflected. Textures which reflect light are often associated with sun-type characteristics such as power and grandeur, even wealth and passion. In western society, people dressing up for special occasions often wear sequins, satin weaves, and metallic fibers. In women's lingerie it is not uncommon to find a negligee made using a satin weave, which has long exposed vertical fibers which reflect light causing the fabric to appear smooth, sleek, and shiny (Wolfe 150-152). Yet, with the employment of the appropriate color combinations, this reflection of light can also make something appear hard and cold. A piece of grey silk with a satin weave shrouding a production's evil character can easily appear as cold as a piece of steel in the dead of winter.

By contrast, other fibers such as cotton and wool and weaves such as the plain weave allow less light reflection. Costumes constructed from these materials appear less grandiose. Often they are used to represent the more simple folk, peasants, animals, and those more in touch with nature.

Pattern

Patterning is yet another important characteristic affecting the perception of an object. It may be woven or printed and will greatly influence the effect of a material. For instance, patterning can affect size perception. Horizontal lines make an object appear wider. Vertical lines make an object appear taller. These are universal effects of pattern. However, an individual's emotional response to a wide or tall object is affected by culture. For instance, Americans tend to have been educated by commercial media to favor people who are tall and thin. Numerous studies indicate that American men and women who are taller work in higher positions and receive higher wages than their shorter counterparts. By contrast, in Africa it is a status symbol to be plump. It demonstrates one can afford to eat well. Thus, a good designer employing patterning to communicate with the audience will understand the cultural values of the intended audience.

Color, form, size, and texture are all valuable tools to the costume designer. A designer who employs these tools effectively can create their own live picture book. Through this live picture book, the designer challenges the audience both visually and linguistically, helping them to experience the play.

Conclusion

A central contention of this paper is that children's theatre costume profoundly affects the spectator. A person is not merely seeing a play, but is also having an emotional reaction to what they are seeing. One study examining the effect of visual images in the media on individuals perception of various objects demonstrated that visual media profoundly affects the viewer. In a somewhat sarcastic account, Detenber relates the study conclusion:

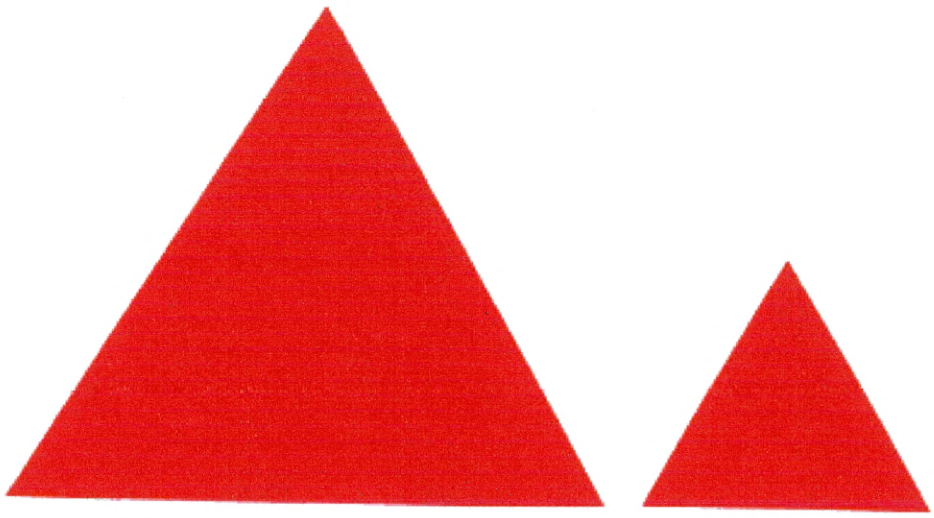
> These results challenge the assumption that the words and pictures in media are merely symbolic. When information is mediated, we often assume that people think about who sent it and why, and, most importantly, what it means. People do not think about what to do, because, after all, these are only pictures. They do not deserve the same consideration as other real experiences. (Detenber 77)

Science suggests that what we see affects us. The things we see may be illusion, but are still perceived to some degree as reality.

I believe not only in the impact of visual messages, but also in the ability of a designer to craft, at least in part, the messages sent by costume. For purposes of concluding the study, I would like to move the discussion, as much as is possible, from theory into practice.

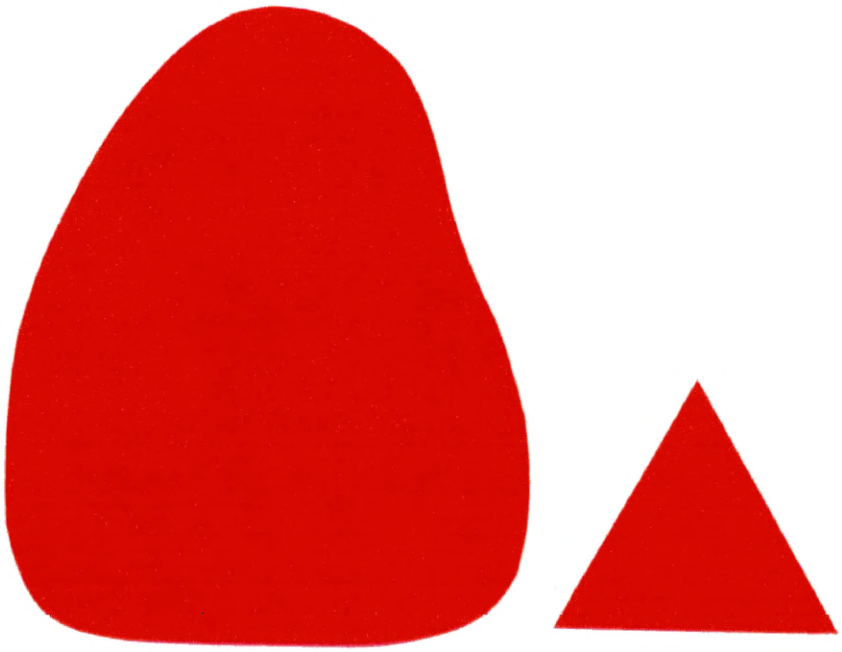
Chapter III: The Designers' Tool Box discussed three separate elements of design. It is impossible for a costume to have shape and no color, or texture and no shape. A costume is composed of a combination of several of these elements. Moreover, the costumes themselves have to support each other and the story. In Molly Bang's compelling analysis, she emphasizes the importance of maintaining both the individual role of each object and the overall unity of the picture.

Bang employs basic geometric shape and color to construct pictures. Below is a description of her work for the story Little Red Riding Hood. The scene is the opening of the story, when Little Red Riding Hood's mother is sending her out to take a basket of treats to her grandmother.



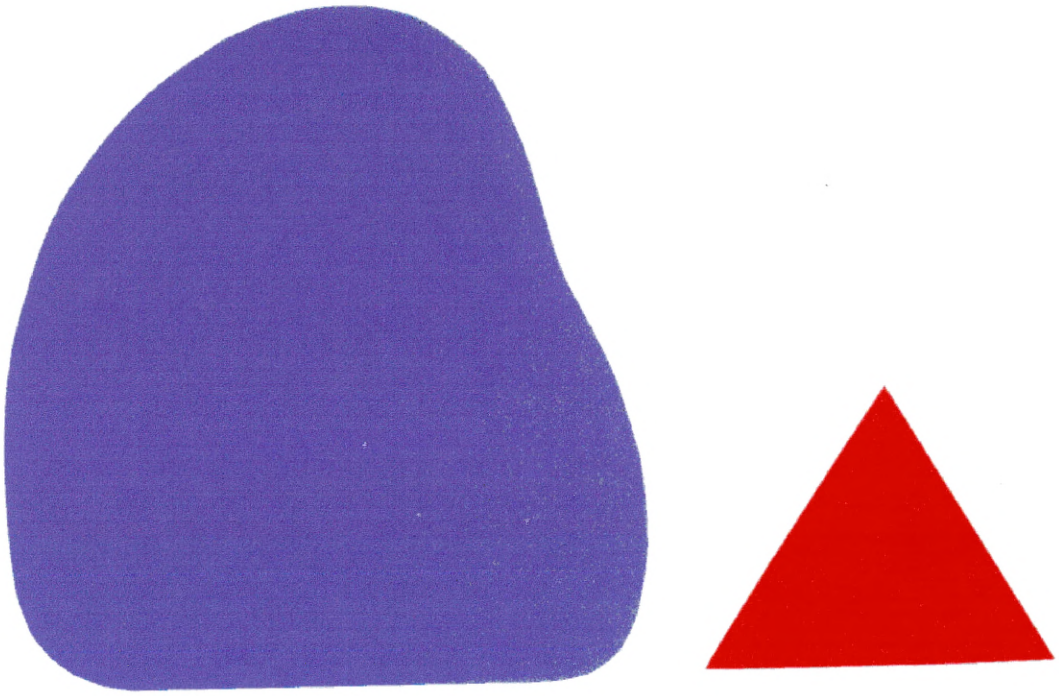
The little triangle pictured above is used to represent Little Red Riding Hood. In this example Bang depicts Little Red Riding Hood's mother as the large red triangle. However, this is an ineffective choice because now the focus is taken away from the story's protagonist. Bang comments, "In addition, though this shape implies a mother who is warm and strong and vital, she is also overbearing and decidedly not huggable" (10).

In order to solve this problem, Bang changes the shape of the mother. Now, she appears softer, but she still remains the dominant focal point.



Bang now asks

> How can I keep her large (since mothers are larger then their young daughters) but still give Little Red Riding Hood prominence in the picture? (11)

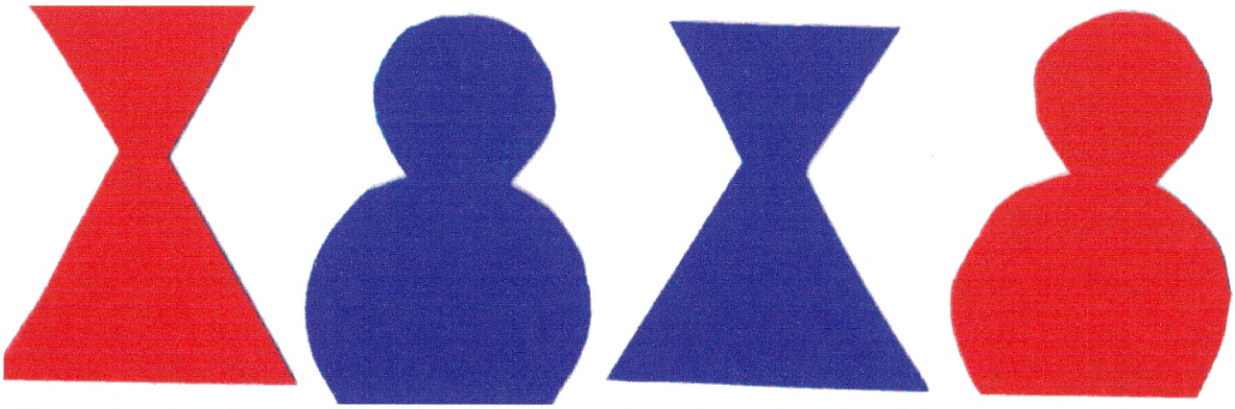


Bang cleverly solves this problem by changing the color of the mother figure. She comments, "If I make her a pale color, she and her daughter are more equal in the picture. Little Red Riding Hood feels comparatively perky and bold" (Bang 11). Bang goes on to incorporate even more subtle elements of color theory.

> The mother could just as easily have been made pale blue, or pale green, but then her color would not at all be related to that of Little

> Red Riding Hood. Since purple has red in it, the mother and daughter are related by color as well [. . .] What do I feel about the mother now?
>
> She seems huggable and stable, though less strong and less warm than before. But she is still motherly, and the emphasis now is on Little Red Riding Hood as much if not more than on her mother. (Bang 11-12)

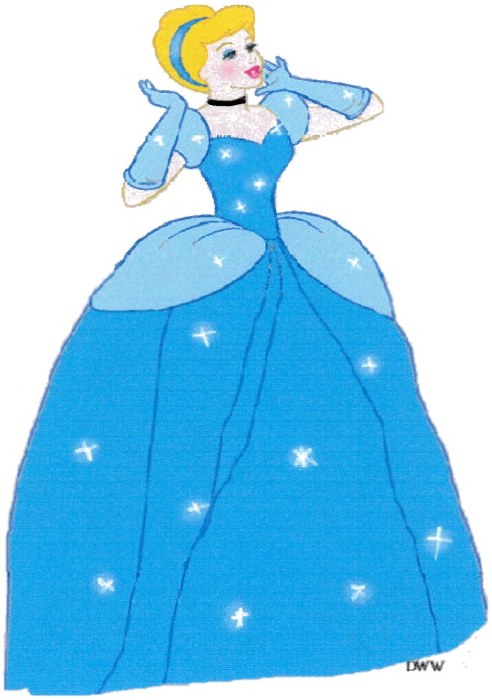
Although Bang is dealing directly with pictures in a literal sense, we as designers are creating live pictures on stage and thus need to consider the way in which our costumes work together to create this picture. In the following discussion, I have used color and basic geometric shape to create two simple dress silhouettes in two colors.



Throughout each comparison the triangular dress is more powerful as compared to the circle dress as is the red dress to the blue dress. To me this is quite clear, but is that clear to children?

To test this hypothesis, I conducted an inquiry. I showed this page to a three-year-old, a seven-year-old, and an eight-year-old and gave them no knowledge of what I was doing except to ask, "Who is the good guy and who is the bad guy?" As discussed in Chapter One, clothing is closely associated with the body and therefore an evil outfit is easily likened to an evil character. Without fail all three children selected the blue circular dress as the "good guy." The identification of the "bad guy" lacked the same clarity. While all three children selected one of the red dresses, only two chose the red dress composed of triangles. The seven-year-old selected the red dress composed of circles. Perhaps to her the circles looked bigger, less stable than the triangle, and thus more imposing. I also think it is interesting that all three children are not yet nine, and if we go by the averages described earlier, are likely to have not yet become form dominant and all independently chose the same color and not the same shape.

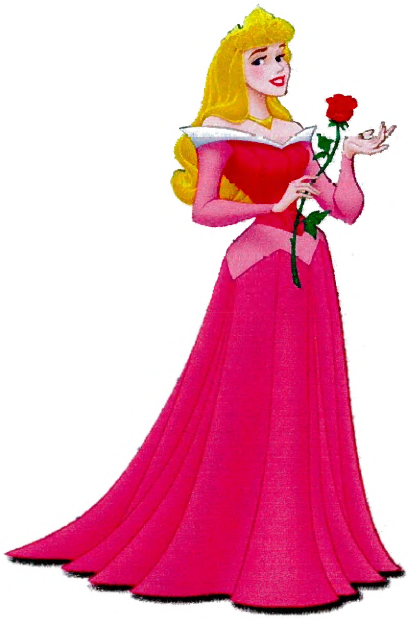
The principle of a blue circular shape is associated with Cinderella's ball gown, in a similar fashion to the way in which the children associated the blue circular dress with the "good guy". By contrast, Aladdin's villain Jafar's clothing is black, red and angular. The principles of this costume resemble the red angular dress which the children associated with the "bad guy".



(Disney Clipart)

(Disney Clipart)

This said, I must concede that each costume encompasses many elements and is viewed in relation to experience and relative to other characters on stage. In other words, there are no guaranteed rules for art creation in general or children's theatre costume design in particular. For example, Princess Aurora, the main protagonist and heroine in Sleeping Beauty, is shown in a dress with many triangular details. It is its pale pink color and fullness of the skirt, producing a round silhouette, which softens the dress. It is the good fairies, a group of three fairies who work to protect Sleeping Beauty against the curse of the evil fairy, who appear more rounded. Thus, the rules have altered from Cinderella to Sleeping Beauty due to character relationship and color choices.



(Disney Clipart)

The collar and bodice of the dress are both angular in nature as is the waist yolk, but the silhouette of the dress is soft and full.

(Disney Clipart)

Although the fairies wear pointy hats they all have rounded bell shaped skirts. Although these may be cartoon examples, the principle is not lost in costuming. Consider the costumes for the children's movie Mary Poppins. In the beginning, when we see the characters Mary Poppins and the children, they are predominately clothed in neutral colors. When they enter Bert's chalk world their colors change from earth tones to pastels.

(www.movies.yahoo.com)

Also, I make several illusions to ruby red slippers during the course of this paper, mainly because I feel it is one of the most successful design decisions ever made. As soon as you see or even here of the slippers, your mind instantly equates the story. Although in the original book, the slippers are silver, when MGM made the film version the shoes were changed to red. Why? Although there is no exact documentation, based on the information in this paper, it is fair to make the following conjectures: Red is considered powerful and the shoes are powerful. Moreover they used next to a yellow road. Silver would easily blend in with yellow. As designers, we all need to strive to make design decisions that can have a profound impact and clearly communicate. What image can we create that will help tell our production's story?

A designer brings their own individual vision on costuming children's theatre. Much insight can be gained by speaking with and viewing the work of different designers. What follows are some notes from interviews with professionals in children's theatre costuming which I have conducted as well as published interviews conducted by other authors. In addition there are several observations made from information on individual children's theatre company's websites.

When I asked children's theatre costume designer Sherri Gerdes of Omaha's The Rose Theatre what her biggest challenge is when costuming for her productions, she jokingly responded, "How to attach ears to an actor's head" (Gerdes). The use of unrealistic elements such as talking animals requiring fantastical costuming elements

such as ears is a trademark characteristic of children's theatre. Designers often find themselves designing for animals and fantastical characters, which in itself becomes a whole philosophy and approach to children's theatre. According to the philosophy, children's theatre costumes have to grab the attention of the children through fantasy. At the Rose, this is almost an unwritten rule. Every play seems to have at least one fantastical costume, characterized by bright colors, dramatic silhouettes or interesting textures. After viewing the costumes for The Three Little Pigs, Stewart Little, Bernstein Bears Christmas, Aladdin Junior, and Madeline's Christmas , all produced by the Rose, realism seemed like a sort of children's theatre abnormality.

Ms. Gerdes is not alone in this children's theatre costuming method. The Mermaid Theatre of Wolfville, Nova Scotia, has a similar practice. Their season line-up and production photos demonstrate their reliance on the bright and bold. However, they clearly specify on their website they want both imaginative elements and challenging texts, and do not want to separate the two elements. "Mermaid Theatre's emphasis on imaginative design elements, original music, and challenging texts provides a rich opportunity to acquaint young spectators with the visual and performing arts as well as with the pleasures of reading" (www.mermaidtheatre.ns.ca).

Fall 2003: When Dinosaurs Dine by Moonlight
Left to Right: Jeffrey Schwager, Alexis Milligan, & Shane Monk

(www.mermaidtheatre.ns.ca)

The whimsical picture above is an excellent example of how children are attracted to fantastical elements. The use of rounded shape throughout the body makes the triceratops seem endearing. The enlarged nature of the individual arm, leg and head sections of the costume not only make the dinosaur seem more convincing as a real character, but also the enlarged size brings the focus to the character and captures the attention of the audience to a specific area. The use of a warm pink color is stimulating. The pink hats and aprons on the male waiters also functions to break down the gender stereotypes and brings the colors together, connecting the human actors with the fantastical triceratops.

The Paper Bag Players of New York City also promote a fantastical element in their costumes. The Paper Bag Players wear a standardized leotard and embellish with painted paper bags, cardboard boxes and simple easy to find materials. These are only three of the many companies who believe in the big, bright, bold imaginative costumes in order to communicate with their child audiences.

(www.paperbagplaycrs.org)

There are other methods, outside of fantasy and exaggeration, to costume for children's theatre. For example, The Seattle Children's Theatre takes a different approach. Like the Rose, they produce professional quality productions; however, the Seattle Children's Theatre shies away from the attention grabbing methods of bright colors and fantasy. "[Linda] Hartzell, [Artistic Director of the Seattle Children's Theatre] sets some ground rules for her new vision of the Seattle Children's Theatre: 'No blue or pink plaid on our stage,' she says. 'No bad synthesizer music. No fake

furry animal costumes. Nothing that people thought children's theatre was'" (Smith 16). In an interview with Alexis Garrigues, costume shop manager at the Seattle Children's Theatre, I asked about the mission statement of the theatre as it related to her overall vision for costuming children's theatre. Garrigues responded:

> You'd have to ask the PR folks for the official mission statement, but as I see it, we do professionally-produced, intelligent plays which do not condescend or pander to our young audiences. The costumes, like the sets, props, lights, sound, and quality of acting and direction, contribute to this by being taken seriously (and budgeted for seriously) by all involved. The phrase 'the kids won't know the difference' is not used here, and the results show that. (Garrigues)

The Seattle Children's Production of Afternoon of the Elves

(www.sct.org)

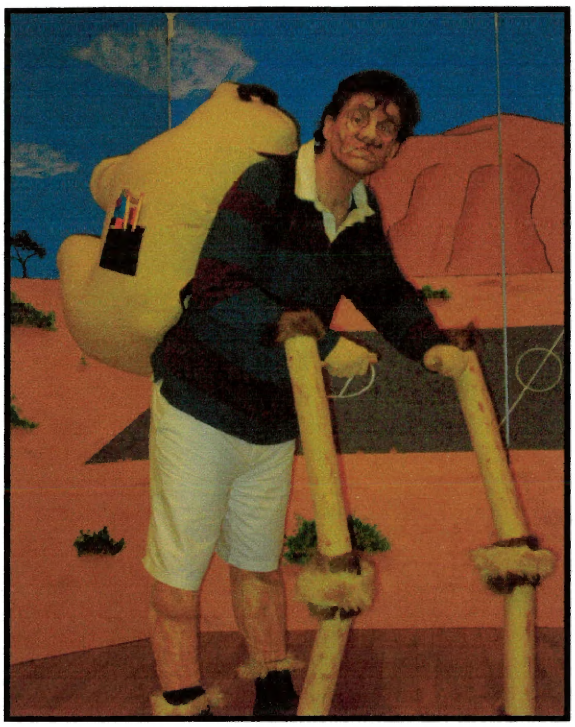
The Children's Theatre at Charlotte takes a similar approach. "Unlike other children's theatre companies, we fine finish everything and hire only professional stitchers" (Amy Akerblom). Both of these companies believe in quality and take a more mature approach to children's theatre costuming.

This brief examination tells us a simple truth: One vision of the best way to create children's theatre costumes simply does not exist, which leads to the question: Is there an approach – such as costumes that are bold, bright, and full of imagination, or costumes that are finely stitched, detailed, ornate, realistic costumes – that is more effective for children's theatre?

The answer, it would seem, is as simple as the question. The approach a designer chooses to costume a children's theatre production should be based on the production message and concept rather than on one methodology. We should not design in primary colors solely because we are designing for children in the same way we should not strive for realism so as to avoid talking down to a young audience. As we learned in Chapter Two, children physically see the same thing as adults. Unlike adults, however, they will seek comprehension through the visual to a larger extent than their adult counterparts and may even then lack the experience to understand complexities such as irony. Still, if a red, blue, yellow color scheme will interest a child audience, it will also engage an adult audience.

I recently saw this simple truth at work. In fall 2006, I designed the costumes for a collaborative children's theatre project at The University of Nebraska at Omaha. The name of the play was The Ostrich Project. In this project I focused on overall effect using bright, bold, colorful, whimsical costumes. However, my costumes were specially crafted to communicate with the audience. In that sense, the costumes did not pander to children and were most similar to those used by the Mermaid Theatre of Wolfville, Nova Scotia.

The Zora Zebra costume incorporated elements that would catch the attention of children in second grade. Her legs double as batons, a toy commonly used by second grade students in the U.S.

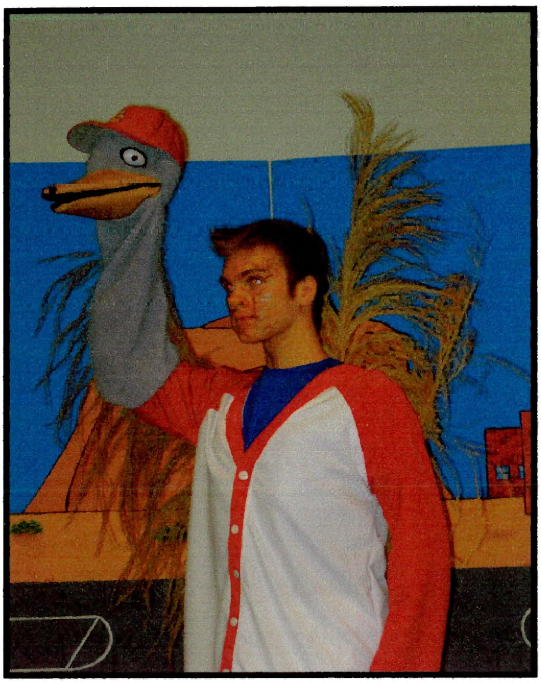


The humps of the Cooper Camel costume doubled as a school backpack,

an object familiar to most U.S. second graders.

Monty Monitor used a skateboard to facilitate his lizard-like movement.

The skateboard appealed to many audience members.



The baseball costume, red coloring, and added height by the hand puppet all drew attention to Oscar Ostrich, the play's protagonist.

On reflection, I believe the costumes were successful because they communicated the distinctive characters to the children but they also grabbed the attention of adults. Therefore, my own experience confirms the finding of this study: When designing for children's theatre, designers should focus on clear communication and take into consideration both the role of experience in children's perception and children's greater reliance on visual communication. Taking note of the subtle dynamics of color, shape, size, and texture is also important. By so doing, we can enrich the quality experience for many children's theatre audiences.

In conclusion, this study has focused on The History of Children's Theatre, The Role of Experience in Perception, and The Designers' Tool Box. I have tried to

bring insight to the historical and contemporary role of children's theatre within cultural contexts of the United States and Canada and provide a greater understanding of the relevant factors and unique challenges in designing for children. I contend that more intentional application of theory allows the designer to better utilize design tools and successfully communicate with the audience. Costume designers create images and symbols that can stay with audiences throughout their lives. For each production, a designer must find a new pair of ruby red slippers so that he/she can intentionally take the audience over the rainbow on an experience they will never forget.

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